

Suite 22 West  
Lancs  
Investment Centre  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 01695 566930  
Direct F 01695 729320

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Mrs J Barnes  
Principal  
The St Lawrence Academy  
Doncaster Road  
Scunthorpe  
Lincolnshire  
DN15 7DF

Dear Mrs Barnes

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to The St Lawrence Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with Heather Richardson HMI to your academy on 10-11 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, staff, groups of students and the Chair of Trustees who is also a representative of the sponsors. There was also a telephone discussion with the School Improvement Partner.

## Context

The St Lawrence is a small 11-16 academy which opened in September 2008 on the site of the predecessor school. It is a fast track academy and was set up within a year. The school is sponsored by the Diocese of Lincoln and the Chair of Trustees is the Bishop of Grimsby. The academy is a specialist sports college with a second specialism in science. It is over-subscribed. Almost one third of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds: their first language is not English. This is above the national average, and high for this region. The main groups are Bangladeshi and

Polish but there are students from a wide range of other backgrounds. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with statements, is above average. The academy is fully staffed: most of the staff were employed by the predecessor school, including most of the senior leadership team. The principal and a number of other staff are new to the academy. The academy has gained the BECTA kitemark for information and communications technology, the Healthy Schools award and the Leading Aspect award for student voice.

### Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

In 2009, the proportion of students who gained at least five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A\*-C was well below average. The result was in line with predictions based on students' Key Stage 2 results, but was below the academy's targets. Significantly fewer students gained a grade C or above in English than in mathematics due to instability of staffing in English and inaccurate assessment of students needing additional support. These issues have been rectified and results are on track to improve in 2010, assisted by closer collaboration between subject leaders in mathematics and English and more rigorous tracking and support to promote students' progress. Year 11 students have already attained a higher percentage of grades C and above in their early entry GCSE English examinations than last year. GCSE module tests in mathematics show that students are on track to sustain similar levels of attainment as in 2009. In 2009, all groups of Year 11 students made satisfactory progress overall and good progress in mathematics.

The academy has built an ethos which values all students and a culture which actively promotes aspiration, self-esteem and a wide range of personal skills and achievements. Students enjoy their learning. They have become more engaged in the life of the academy and this is reflected in their above average attendance. Students appreciate the support for their learning that is provided by a wide range of adults in lessons and at other times. They enjoy the practical and well-resourced activities that are provided in many lessons. They particularly enjoyed the special day of house activities that took place during the inspection. This successfully brought together students of different ages in learning projects that extended their relationships, developed their skills of working in teams and promoted their personal development and enjoyment in learning.

An increased proportion of younger students has entered school with below average levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. This presents an important challenge to raising attainment in the future. The school has appointed a literacy coordinator and plans are being developed to strengthen provision in this area.

## Other relevant pupil outcomes

Many opportunities have been created for students to become leaders and to express their views. For example, student subject leaders help other students, prefects make presentations to trustees and individual students take a lead in review meetings with parents. These roles successfully promote individual and collective pride and responsibility. The academy's specialism in sports provides additional opportunities to lead activities and develop good relationships with younger students, including pupils in local primary schools. Students value the peer mentoring system and mentors appreciate the privilege of helping other students. The introduction of a new house system is promoting students' teamwork as well as the academy's positive community spirit. There is much enthusiasm and commitment from students and staff about this development.

Students and staff report on their sense of pride in the academy, together with greater enjoyment and improved behaviour. The level of exclusions is low. The behaviour observed by inspectors was good overall, with some examples of very considerate behaviour. In most lessons observed students' good behaviour contributed positively to their learning, through efficient use of time and purposeful collaborative work. For example, in a drama lesson groups of students collaborated well to devise a short scene; they then watched each others' performances attentively and provided constructive feedback. On occasion, students are less attentive when activities are not sufficiently challenging or engaging. Students report that they feel safe in the academy and are confident that they know that staff are always available for them.

## The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, but there are some notable strengths and areas of good practice. A number of factors promote consistency in lessons, including the use of a helpful lesson planning format to set out the expectations for learning. In addition, teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour. Good relationships and mutual respect foster learning. Teachers generally make good use of praise to promote learning and engagement. The pace of lessons is often good and activities are varied, although opportunities are missed to help students take responsibility for their learning. Learning and teaching assistants contribute well to students' learning when their work is targeted to the particular needs of individuals or groups. Differentiation is variable; although teachers show awareness of students' needs, their lesson plans do not always set out with sufficient clarity how these needs will be met. Students' progress is sometimes limited because tasks or questions are not precise enough to meet their needs. Although some marking is of a high quality and provides students with a clear view of the merits of their work and what they need to improve, there is currently too much inconsistency. Some work is marked cursorily and insufficient attention is paid to subject-specific targets for improvement, as opposed to presentation. There are some good examples of the

analysis of students' specific knowledge, skills and understanding to evaluate and inform teaching and learning but these are not widespread.

The academy has focused on tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of students more precisely. This has resulted, for example, in a wider range of choices and curriculum routes for students at Key Stage 4, together with accreditation at levels appropriate to their needs. This includes provision for the more able students through additional courses in subjects such as sociology and critical thinking, as well as option choices for students to study practical subjects, such as Construction and Hair and Beauty, in partnership with the local college. The academy's plans recognise the need to strengthen students' basic skills.

The academy has opted for a relatively traditional curriculum model but has introduced some innovative elements. These include five themed activity days, one of which was taking place on the first day of this inspection. To date, these days are proving successful in promoting students' personal development and teamwork. Nevertheless, the academy is aware of the need to keep them under continuous review to ensure that they remain purposeful and engaging events. Senior students appreciate the subject choices now available to them and students of all ages cite the range of extra-curricular opportunities they have as a key factor in their enjoyment of academy life. The academy's specialism makes a particular contribution to the range and quality of opportunities for sport, as well as the facilities available to students and the wider community.

Members of staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the care, guidance and support of students. They are well-informed of students' needs and are keenly aware that some students are coping with challenging personal circumstances. The academy has strengthened its links with other agencies to support the most vulnerable students, as well as developing its own internal mechanisms. The restructuring of staffing responsibilities, with the appointment of achievement team leaders in each year group, has increased the focus on academic progress as well as pastoral support. Their work is complemented by the house tutorial system which is a visible and strong feature of school life. The single central record for staff and regular visitors meets current requirements.

#### The effectiveness of leadership and management

Plans for the development of the academy are being implemented well. The Church of England and the trustees have worked sensitively with other educational partners and mosque representatives to gain community support for the academy. It has established an inclusive academy that serves the local multi-faith community and celebrates its diversity. The academy's emphasis on spiritual development is planned in ways that are accessible to the broad range of students, for example in the use of candles for moments of reflection. The academy's Christian values of truth, justice, forgiveness, generosity and respect are reflected in its policies and practice. The

principal provides a clear vision for raising achievement and has successfully engaged staff and students in building an inclusive and positive learning culture with high expectations of improved attainment. The academy has been well structured with a clear rationale that matches its vision and ways of working. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The grouping of subjects, the establishment of a house system and the systems for supporting and monitoring pastoral and academic progress promote students' personal development and the cohesiveness of the academy.

The academy has met most of the priorities set out in its plan for the first year. For example, it has established a positive learning culture with an effective use of rewards and sanctions to promote good behaviour. At the end of the first year, in order to increase the focus on raising attainment, it supplemented its development plans with whole school and departmental raising attainment plans. Higher expectations were set and aligned to the potential of different groups of students. New and more regular systems of accountability for staff were introduced, supported by more detailed assessment data showing the progress of students in all year groups. Academy development plans show actions to be taken but lack clarity about short and medium term priorities and dates for reviewing progress within the year.

The academy has regularly reviewed the quality of teaching and the impact on students' learning, through lesson observations. As a result, it has a substantial amount of information about strengths and areas for improvement. This is beginning to be used to inform development within curriculum areas. However, the academy has not marshalled its information to provide a coherent overview of the quality of teaching which can be used as a baseline from which to chart improvement, to inform whole-school priorities or to share good practice.

The academy's self-evaluation is developing through the increased engagement of middle leaders in analysing their impact. The leaders have prioritised improved processes of self-evaluation rather than the production of a formal document. The evidence and outcomes of evaluation have not been synthesised into a complete and incisive account of the academy's strengths, weaknesses and areas for development.

### External support

The support days from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust provided by the Department for Children Schools and Families have had a significant impact in learning about and adopting good practice from other secondary schools and in-service training. The trustees of the academy have a wide range of relevant expertise from other sectors of education and other professions which has been used effectively to advise on and support management decisions. The School Improvement Partner has provided effective support and challenge. The Youth Sports Trust and the Diocese have provided valued support in developing the plans for the new sports college building. Scunthorpe United Football Club has provided

good support for student mentoring. The local authority has provided effective support for the development of provision for vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for the development of music. The local 14-19 network has provided a helpful forum for planning the provision of diplomas.

## Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
  - the proportion of students gaining at least five GCSEs at grades A\* - C, including English and mathematics, increases in 2010
  - literacy and numeracy skills improve as shown by the good progress made by Year 7 students whose current attainment in reading, writing and/or mathematics is below Level 4.
- Improve the use of assessment by ensuring that:
  - all staff use assessment information to plan lessons that meet students' specific needs
  - marking is more frequent and systematically identifies what students have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the rigour of development planning and self-evaluation so that:
  - short and medium term timescales and priorities are stated explicitly
  - leaders document explicit and evidenced judgements on the overall progress and impact of the academy.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Trustees and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of Trustees  
the Academies Group, DCSF [ [Paul.hann@dczf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dczf.gsi.gov.uk) ]