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Mr Michael Whitworth  
Wren Academy  
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London  
N12 9NW

Dear Mr Whitworth

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Wren Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with Mary Massey HMI to your academy on 16-17 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 the first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, vice principal, members of the teaching staff and leadership teams, groups of pupils and the vice chair of governors. They attended lessons and studied pupils' work in their exercise books.

## Context

The academy opened in September 2008 with 165 Year 7 pupils and admitted a further cohort in September 2009. There are now 335 pupils on roll divided between Year 7 and Year 8. It is planned that the academy will increase by admitting a new cohort annually until it is providing education for 11-18 year olds. There was no predecessor school.

The academy principal joined four terms in advance of the first cohort and has recruited staff to meet the ongoing expansion ever since. There have been no major difficulties in recruiting teachers or other staff.

Two of the three buildings planned for immediate use are open, with a third due to be opened in the summer of 2010.

The main sponsor of the Academy is the London Diocesan Board for Schools and the co-sponsor is Berkhamsted School, a co-educational independent school. The academy's specialism is in Design and the Built Environment.

Over thirty ethnic groups are represented at the academy, the most numerous being White British who comprise 25% of the pupil population. All other ethnic groups are significantly smaller in number. A higher than average proportion of pupils is in receipt of free school meals; but many pupils come from relatively affluent backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is around the national average and nine pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or disability.

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

Most pupils arrive at the academy with average or above average prior attainment as indicated by their scores in national assessment tests at the end of Key Stage 2. However within each cohort there are a few learners who have gaps in their knowledge and mastery of skills such as reading and spelling. These learners are quickly identified and very well supported. As a result they make excellent progress in catching up.

Leaders have created an ethos where it is cool to succeed and consequently all pupils take their learning very seriously. They aspire to achieve well and look forward to playing a full role in society. Several talked of their enthusiasm for design and for project management which had been engendered through their work within the academy's specialism.

The academy sets all pupils very challenging targets and monitors their progress towards these rigorously. Few individuals underachieve for long as they are quickly identified and strategies introduced to support them. No group underachieves. Pupils of all abilities are proud of their work. Their presentation is very good and their books show that they are consistently, lesson by lesson, making very good progress. This is particularly apparent where teachers have identified for each individual pupil what they are achieving well and precisely what they need to do to move up to the next level. Both the English and the Art and Design departments are exceptionally good at this.

As a result of these factors, attainment is very high. In lessons, pupils show enjoyment of their learning, but there is scope for teachers to be even more imaginative in their teaching.

### Other relevant pupil outcomes

The high levels of motivation, above average attendance and excellent behaviour of pupils contribute to their success in learning and in important other elements of their

development. Different groups of pupils that we met all agreed that they really value the academy and all it has to offer, highlighting their learning, the atmosphere and ethos of the academy, the leadership opportunities they have, and the academy's compulsory enrichment programme as particular strengths.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for and are willing to take risks in their learning as a result. Various groups in the school take very active roles in leadership, for example, the Eco-squad, which has made a considerable difference in seeking to ensure that the activities within the school are environmentally sustainable, and the student leaders, who are elected by their peers. This latter group has introduced a large number of initiatives. These include introducing a 'friendship bench' in the playground, holding surgeries to sort out difficulties, hosting a tea party for local elderly residents, and contributing to the staff recruitment process.

#### The effectiveness of provision

The lessons observed by inspectors were consistently of high quality. However, as a rule, they did not excite and inspire pupils. This was because, in general, teachers held too much control and did not allow pupils the freedom to manage their own learning or rise to significant challenges. Where teaching was outstanding it was often because pupils were given the freedom to respond to challenges in different ways. In these examples whole lessons were sharply focussed on ensuring the maximum learning for each pupil with a careful match of tasks to individual pupil's learning needs. Some teachers used questioning well to identify levels of understanding which enabled them to judge exactly what to focus on next with different groups. However, although the provision for pupils with learning difficulties is excellent when withdrawn from lessons they sometimes did not get sufficient targeted support in class.

Many teachers were very effective at identifying the generic skills needed in different activities and reminding pupils of these. They demonstrate a commitment to helping pupils improve their literacy in subjects other than English. All lessons observed were carefully planned and well structured to ensure a progression in learning.

Pupils share the vision of the academy's leaders that education is about excellent academic progress as well as the development of wider skills and attributes. These are fostered in lessons, where pupils are reminded of the need for resilience, responsibility and other qualities and in the wider 'enrichment' curriculum. On three afternoons a week all pupils are obliged to stay in school for an additional hour to follow a programme of wider activities. These include learning the Japanese language, many different sporting and musical opportunities, debating, art and design and learning support. They are run by teachers, support staff, additional staff and in some instances, such as the MANGA (a Japanese cartoon genre) by pupils themselves. The curriculum as a whole serves the needs of all pupils very effectively. The specialism runs through many different lessons and has also been the subject of

focus days. One recent focus day, for example, led by an architect, set pupils the challenge of designing shelters for use in Haiti after the recent earthquake. Plans for future curriculum development are appropriate.

All pupils are well cared for and the academy's safeguarding is of very high quality. Those pupils who have been disciplined, understand what they did wrong and many have had help in learning to manage their behaviour. They assert that systems in the academy are fair and supportive. The vertical tutor groups have enabled Year 8 pupils to take an active role in helping those new to the academy and encourage them to be good role models.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have established a vibrant learning community. Pupils want to learn and engage fully with all that the academy offers. Teaching is consistently good. Staff and pupils share a clear understanding of the purpose of the academy and there is a genuine commitment to improvement at all levels. Pupil performance data is used well to ensure that all pupils make outstanding progress, but data is not yet used sharply enough to generate a fully accurate overview of the progress of groups of pupils over time.

Ownership of the academy development plan is shared and is driven by challenging quantitative and qualitative targets. These are not always reflected in the plans made by middle leaders and evaluation is not always appropriately focussed on outcomes for pupils. Departmental heads are given good support as they develop their leadership skills. The governors oversee progress towards the academy's targets well. Minutes of the governing body indicate that they are unafraid to offer challenge and determine strategy within a supportive context. First steps have been taken towards raising standards in the wider community but leaders recognise that this is at an early stage of development.

### External support

The principal is very happy with the levels of support given by the school improvement partner and the DCSF and it has certainly been sufficient to help secure very positive outcomes for pupils. As a consequence this support is judged to be good.

### Main Judgement

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Further develop the teaching in the academy so that a higher proportion of lessons demand more active participation from pupils enabling them to lead and manage their own learning.
- Refine the use of pupil performance data to enable leaders to measure and take an overview of progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing

Her Majesty's Inspector

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