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Ms Smita Bora
Westminster Academy
The Naim Dangoor Centre
255 Harrow Road
London
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Dear Ms Bora

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 2 February 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. I would particularly like to thank the group of Year 11 students I spoke to for their honesty and openness; their views informed a very important part of my judgement.

Since the previous inspection the academy has had a considerable number of changes to staff and an increase in student mobility. This manifested itself in a significant number of spare places in Year 7 in September, and a large increase in sixth form numbers. The vacancies in Year 7 left the academy vulnerable to casual admissions, but this has been carefully managed. As well as the appointment of a new head of mathematics, there have been a number of staffing changes in the English, mathematics and science departments. These have presented the academy with some difficult challenges which the principal and governors have dealt with well.

The single central record meets current government requirements. Some minor administrative errors were apparent with regard to volunteers at the beginning of the inspection. These were corrected by the end of the visit.

As a result of the inspection on 13-14 May 2009, the school was asked to:

- Accelerate students' progress and raise standards by:
- further improving the way teachers use information about students' prior attainment to plan lessons that better match their learning needs
 - ensuring that marking enables students to understand what they need to do to improve
 - maximising opportunities in lessons and through other activities for students to develop their basic skills in literacy and numeracy.



Take steps to ensure that the number of older students engaging in physical activities increases.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Overall, standards in GCSE examinations rose in 2009 to below the national average. The number of students attaining five good passes increased from well below to in line with the national average. Those attaining five good passes including English and mathematics almost doubled and, although still well below average, this is a significant improvement. This was a direct result of a rise in standards in English, mathematics and science. Standards in most subjects were broadly average, with the notable exception of design and technology, where they were exceptionally low. Senior leaders understand the reasons for this, have taken appropriate steps to improve the situation and report that standards will rise this year.

The 2009 GCSE results represented satisfactory progress for that cohort of students. The academy is rightly proud of this, particularly as achievement in both 2007 and 2008 was inadequate. Evidence from lesson observations and data provided by the academy demonstrates that satisfactory progress is being maintained by the current Year 11 cohort in both English and mathematics. This is confirmed by the results of early GCSE entries in English and modular tests in mathematics. However, data provided by the academy, a scrutiny of students' work and lesson observations do not provide the same level of confidence in the science results.

During the inspection lessons in English and science were seen but due to timetable constraints no mathematics lessons were observed. Lessons observed jointly confirm that senior staff are accurate judges of the quality of teaching and learning. Observations indicate that the quality of teaching is variable and not always good enough, for example in science. The work of the English department now has an evident consistency and coherence and good use is made of prior attainment information to plan purposeful, appropriate lessons. Marking in English is regular and makes helpful suggestions for improvement. Students say they appreciate this individualised approach to improving their learning. Marking in science is much less consistent and tends to focus on presentational issues rather than giving students helpful feedback to help them improve.

The academy has very successfully encouraged more students to engage in sport. The head of physical education has introduced an 'activity passport' which has greatly increased students' awareness of the range of opportunities the academy offers both during and after the taught day. As a result, participation in a range of sports has increased substantially. The introduction of 'girls only' sessions is greatly appreciated by students.

The academy uses its specialist links very well to provide a range of additional opportunities for students, including successful weekly work experience for those in Year 10. However, in 2009 the academy did not meet its specialist targets in business and enterprise, or in information and communications technology where they were missed by a significant margin, but exceeded them in mathematics. Results in mathematics, therefore, made an important contribution to raising standards across the academy.

Students are highly supportive of the academy and speak warmly of the principal's approachability. Her open style is an asset to the academy. However, she acknowledges that the senior leadership team needs to monitor more rigorously, including the work of the science department, to ensure that teaching and learning improve and that marking is more consistently helpful to students.

The statement of action is fit for purpose and focuses appropriately on the key areas for action. The academy benefits from the rigorous challenge of the School Improvement Partner and a range of support from other academy principals. The academy also receives support from a number of external consultants, some provided by the local authority. The academy finds this helpful in promoting improvement, but the evaluation of the quality of science lessons by consultants is over generous.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes
Her Majesty's Inspector