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Mr T Megahy  
Executive Principal  
Trent Valley Academy  
Sweyn Lane  
off Corringham Road  
Gainsborough  
DN21 1PB

Dear Mr Megahy

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Trent Valley Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with Davinder Dosanjh HMI to your academy on 22 and 23 June 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 Executive Principal, key staff, groups of students and a governor. The Chair of the Local Governing Body was contacted by telephone.

## Context

Trent Valley Academy opened in September 2008, sponsored by E-Act in partnership with the Gainsborough Education Village Trust. The Executive Principal was originally appointed to oversee the federation between Castle Hills Community Arts College and the Middlefield School of Technology. He led the opening of the academy on the sites of the two predecessor schools and its move to new buildings in September 2009. Around one third of the teaching staff have been appointed since the academy opened. The academy operates in an area where some students are selected by ability to attend a grammar school. Students' attainment on entry to Year 7 varies from well below average to below average, and shows a gradually improving trend. However, there are few students with the higher Level 5 at the end of Year 6.



The academy is slightly larger than average. There are relatively few students from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language, although numbers have increased recently. The proportions of students with a statement of special educational needs or with special educational needs and/or disabilities are high. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. An average proportion of students joins or leaves the academy during the year. The academy has specialisms in performing arts and technology.

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is improving. In 2009, some indicators such as the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at GCSE and at least one grade A\*-G were broadly average. The proportion achieving five or more grades A\*-C improved markedly on the results achieved by the predecessor schools to 50% but remained below average in 2009. With English and mathematics included, it was well below average at 31%, although it surpassed the National Challenge target. Most students exceeded their challenging targets. Results in science were significantly below those nationally although the academy has now adjusted courses to be more appropriate for students and this is already improving outcomes.

Results from early entries to GCSE and the academy's assessment information indicate that current Year 11 students are likely to improve again on attainment in 2009. The proportion gaining a grade C or above in English is likely to rise again and the position will be similar in mathematics. Around 35% of students are predicted to achieve five higher grades including both English and mathematics. Academy staff have worked very hard to raise attainment in these subjects through booster classes and targeted support for individuals and small groups. There is careful monitoring of students' progress and clear identification of those who need additional support. Nevertheless, there is still a significant number of students who are likely to achieve a grade C in either English or mathematics but not both. Increasingly, changes to other courses offered to students in Years 9 and 10, for example the introduction of BTEC certificate and diploma courses, are already raising achievement.

In 2009, students made broadly satisfactory progress from their low starting points. Girls, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language made better progress than their peers. Boys made slower progress overall, although this was not the case for those with the lowest prior attainment. The academy's assessment information indicates that current Year 11 students are likely to make at least satisfactory progress in most areas and to exceed the challenging targets set for them.

In the lessons observed, students made satisfactory and often good progress. They generally settle to work quickly and cooperate well. However, they vary in their



confidence to speak in front of the class. They are familiar with criteria for levels or grades and increasingly use them to assess their own work and that of their peers.

### Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour has improved significantly. The school is calm and orderly, and students are welcoming and friendly. In lessons, most students have positive attitudes to learning and work steadily. Relationships between adults and students are a crucial feature of the best learning. Systems for managing behaviour are increasingly a strength of the academy. Fixed-term exclusions have decreased dramatically from the level in the predecessor schools. They fell to 130 in the first year of the academy on two sites. Since the move to the new buildings in September 2009 there have been just twelve fixed-term exclusions. The academy has had no permanent exclusions. The very effective internal referral unit caters mostly for boys, predominantly for a single day at a time. Referral rates are below 5% of the student roll. Detailed analysis of referrals enables senior leaders to have a comprehensive overview of behaviour. Older students say behaviour has improved since the move to the new building. Students feel safe and say that staff care for them well. In particular, they know who to go to for support. Students are keen to make a positive contribution to the academy and the wider community through the student council and fundraising activities.

Attendance, while improving over time, remains below average. There are effective systems for monitoring attendance, including first-day notification for parents and the use of attendance panels with multi-agency involvement. However, these have not yet had sufficient impact. Levels of persistent absence declined initially this year but have risen again recently to the level of the previous year. Current Year 9 students have the lowest level of attendance.

### The effectiveness of provision

The majority of the 18 lessons seen were good with a small number judged outstanding. In an English lesson, the teacher gained students' interest and gave them confidence in completing a task by using a very dramatic demonstration of the difference that stage directions make to the effect of what a character might say in a play script. Teachers plan in detail and make lesson objectives clear, often setting different expectations for students of differing prior attainment. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and most use computers and interactive white boards well to interest students and, as in the case of an effective Spanish lesson, to check students' recall and understanding at the end of a lesson. In the better lessons, teachers use questions carefully to extend students' answers and to prompt them to explain their ideas. They use strong relationships to create a purposeful but encouraging atmosphere in lessons which, along with high expectations, enables students to make good progress. In a minority of lessons, although the planning and lesson content was sound, the teaching did not engage students fully and learning



was slower as a result. Teaching assistants provide effective support to students with a wide range of needs, encouraging them to participate and explaining clearly what they need to do.

Students know their targets and can explain what they need to do to improve their work. In lessons, they regularly use criteria for levels and grades to structure their work and to assess their progress. Teachers' marking varies in quality and, in the best examples, gives very clear advice on how to improve further. Teachers assess students' work regularly and record their progress. This assessment information is analysed and used to identify those students who require additional support and to review the progress of specific groups of students.

The academy has a broad and effective curriculum which meets the needs and interests of students. It is kept constantly under review and has been adapted well to cater for the full range of abilities. This has led to improved behaviour and rising attainment. There is an increasing choice of vocational and academic options which some students begin in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11 some students take GCSE English and mathematics examinations early. Students access varied vocational and occupational courses through the local 14-19 partnership, including new diplomas. The Learning for Life curriculum provides an effective vehicle to develop students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural awareness. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and additional support for students who are falling behind.

The academy's specialisms in technology and performing arts are promoted through a range of curriculum options. Large numbers of students take part in the annual drama production. Performing arts makes a strong contribution to students' personal development. There is a good range of technology-based vocational and occupational courses. The academy works closely with The Young Americans, a performing arts college in California. They have visited on five occasions, providing outstanding coaching in the performing arts. The academy is working hard to ensure that the specialisms have an impact on provision and outcomes across the academy.

Staff know the students well. The academy provides very effective support for those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Procedures for pastoral care are very clear and well organised. The statutory requirements for safeguarding are adhered to and there is invaluable work with external agencies, especially with a focus on early intervention. The flexible learning programme, which supports up to 19 young people at risk of exclusion, ensures that they leave with valuable qualifications. In 2010 all are likely to achieve five GCSEs at grades A\* to G. Student support managers are available to deal with issues throughout the day for students, parents and carers. Staff and students comment positively on the impact of this initiative and it is a major factor in the significant reduction in exclusions.



## The effectiveness of leadership and management

The academy is led effectively by the principal and senior staff. They set a clear direction focused on raising students' attainment and improving their personal and social skills. Senior staff have clear responsibilities and work together well to implement strategic plans. The academy has focused unremittingly on the achievement of students in Key Stage 4 and, particularly, on English and mathematics. This has resulted in close supervision of action in these subjects and very regular meetings between senior leaders and subject leaders. These meetings ensure that students' progress and the range of interventions are kept under close and constant review. Innovative strategies focus on the students most in need of improving their grades, using experienced teachers to coach them. This strategy is now being extended to science. There are clear expectations for teachers' planning, use of assessment and support for students. The quality of teaching is monitored regularly and the academy has taken care to appoint effective teachers to help to move the range of teaching skills and methods forward. Systems for analysing the outcomes of observations and using them to inform future training are under development. The academy recognises the need to identify and share the most effective practice more widely to improve teaching further.

Senior staff and the local governing body have an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development. They use assessment data and the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation, including feedback from students, to identify priorities and to formulate concise action plans. These are reviewed frequently and action is targeted accordingly. Governors have a well-organised committee structure and regularly review the academy's progress. Middle leaders increasingly take full accountability for provision and outcomes in their areas of responsibility. They are developing a cycle for monitoring provision and evaluating progress, but this is not yet systematic. Senior staff lead local initiatives such as the development of courses for 14 to 19 year olds in the area. Another is assisting the local authority in developing provision for students who are out of school or at risk of exclusion. The academy has improved several key outcomes for students over the last two years and has shown that it has the ability to bring about positive change.

## External support

The academy receives effective challenge and support from its School Improvement Partner and from representatives of the sponsors. The academy's self-evaluation and progress is reviewed regularly, leading to detailed reports. Strategies for improvement have been evaluated and useful connections recommended with effective schools in similar circumstances. The academy commissions support from the local authority and values the training and guidance provided by subject consultants. There are developing partnerships with another academy group and with other academies within the sponsor's control. These contacts broaden the range of activities used to extend students' experiences and to raise their achievement.



## Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of students achieving a grade C or above in both English and mathematics by targeting those who currently only achieve a grade C in one of these subjects.
- Narrow the gap between the best and the least effective teaching by ensuring that the most successful practice is routinely shared and adopted.
- Further develop the quality of middle leaders' systematic evaluation of provision in their areas, including the monitoring of teaching and assessment.
- Further improve the effectiveness of strategies to reduce the number of students who are persistently absent.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

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