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18 November 2011

Richard Williams  
Principal  
Dover Christ Church Academy  
Melbourne Avenue  
Whitfield  
Dover  
Kent  
CT16 2EG

Dear Mr Williams

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Dover Christ Church Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Alan Taylor-Bennett HMI to your academy on 16 and 17 November 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection 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, members of the leadership team, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body, who is also a representative of the sponsors.

### **Context**

The academy opened in September 2010 with specialisms of music, mathematics and computing. There are 950 students on roll, including 129 in the sixth form. The academy has a specialist unit that caters for students who have profound, severe and complex educational needs. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is almost double the national average. Around one quarter of students are eligible for free school meals. Most students are White

British and few students speak English as an additional language. The level of student mobility is low. The academy has experienced some turbulence in the staffing of mathematics.

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

Students join the academy with overall low attainment. This is reflected in their average points scores at Key Stage 2, which are generally two to three points below the national average. A high proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Progress in lessons is generally satisfactory and younger students are currently making the best progress. There is a range of strategies in place to accelerate students' progress and early evidence shows that this is having a positive impact on boosting their performance. In 2011 the academy did not achieve its challenging GCSE targets but observation of students' work and the academy's own tracking data show that an increasing proportion of students are on track to achieve their targets this year. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are closely monitored and effective new systems and procedures have been implemented to ensure that the academy has a reliable baseline from which future progress can be measured.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Students confirm that behaviour has improved. Exclusions and incidents involving inappropriate behaviour have reduced significantly. Attendance is improving due to the actions the academy is taking to challenge and support students who do not attend regularly. However, there are too many students who have poor attendance and this limits their learning opportunities and slows progress. Students feel that their views are sought but they do not feel fully consulted and would like to have more responsibilities and be better informed about proposed improvements that affect their learning and development.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Leaders and managers have shown a strong commitment to improving the quality of teaching. Teachers and other adults in the classroom generally have high expectations of what students might achieve. Examples of good practice were seen, where teachers used a good range of the accurate and reliable assessment information that is available, to plan lessons that met the needs and interests of the different groups of students. Teaching is improving but the use of assessment to consistently inform and accelerate learning is still at an early stage of development. In some lessons students are supported and enabled so that they can evaluate their own progress towards the learning objective, but in other lessons these opportunities for students to develop greater independence are missed.

The curriculum is very flexible and responsive to students' needs and has a strong focus on enterprise. The academy provides a suitable range of academic and vocational choices and makes good use of partnership arrangements to strengthen the curriculum and provide students with memorable experiences. The 'A+' curriculum for students in Years 7 and 8 helps to build their self-esteem and prepares them well for the next stage in their learning. The academy has plans to develop and improve the sixth form curriculum through closer collaboration with other local schools and organisations. The academy's specialisms are developing but they do not yet make a significant contribution to raising achievement for all students.

This is a very inclusive setting where students are valued regardless of their background or abilities. Students are cared for well and arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities get the support that they need. Students speak positively about the pastoral care they receive and value the work of their tutors and other staff. A few of the older students do not feel that they get the quality of advice and guidance that they need, particularly those who are planning to go on to further or higher education.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The senior leadership team has been restructured and there have been a number of changes of personnel at middle leadership level. This has resulted in roles and responsibilities being clearly defined and understood and improved lines of accountability. The senior team has a clear focus on improving students' achievement. Improved monitoring and accurate self-evaluation inform planning and are driving improvement. Senior leaders have successfully communicated their ambitious vision for the academy and motivated staff to be reflective and to want to develop their practice. Leadership at subject level is variable and some leaders are still at an early stage in being effective in leading improvement. The governing body has identified appropriate priorities for development and provides the academy with a good balance of challenge and support. Success in tackling areas of weakness and an improving trend in outcomes for students demonstrate that the academy has the capacity for sustained improvement.

### **External support**

The academy commissioned external consultants to evaluate the academy's performance and validate its self-evaluation. Good partnerships between the academy and the co-sponsors have enabled the sharing of staff and expertise. This has had a positive impact on improving teaching and supporting weaker areas of the curriculum. Canterbury Christ Church University, the lead sponsor, has provided professional development opportunities for staff and has supported sixth-form students through the use of student ambassadors and visits to local campuses. This

has had a positive impact on raising their awareness of different career paths and their aspirations.

## **Main Judgements**

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Build on improvements to teaching to ensure that the proportion of teaching that is good or better increases in order to accelerate students' progress in all subjects and take advantage of students' improved attitudes to learning.
- Ensure that the use of assessment to inform teachers' planning is embedded so that tasks and activities are consistently matched to the needs and abilities of the different groups of students.
- Provide students with more opportunities to develop independence by enabling and empowering them to evaluate their progress and the progress of others.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**