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15 May 2009

Mr Eric Jackson  
Principal  
St Anne's Academy  
Hollins Lane  
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Manchester  
M24 6XN

Dear Mr Jackson

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to St Anne's Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with Bernard Campbell HMI and Linda Tetik HMI to your academy on 13 and 14 May 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

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

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, groups of students and the chair of governors.

## Context

St Anne's Academy opened in September 2007, housed in the buildings of the predecessor school. A mainly new-build project is proposed for completion by September 2010. The academy has the capacity to provide 750 places for 11–16-year-olds, and there are 530 students on roll currently. There remains variation in the number of students in some year groups. While numbers in Years 8 and 9 are relatively low, Year 11 and the predicted Year 7 intake from September are nearer to full capacity. Collaborative arrangements with two local schools are helping to develop a range of sixth form courses, with capacity for 150 students in the academy's own newly-opened sixth form provision. There are currently 54 students in Year 12.

The majority of the staff at the predecessor school transferred to the academy, including the headteacher and deputy headteacher, now principal and senior vice-principal. Three newly appointed assistant principals also joined when the academy opened. Several teaching staff secured promoted posts within the new staffing structure, including the junior vice-principal who is also the director of the sixth form.

The academy is staffed with suitably experienced and qualified teachers and support staff and does not suffer from any problems with staff absence.

St Anne's academy is jointly sponsored by the Church of England Diocese of Manchester and David and Anne Crossland, and its ethos is based on Christian values. The academy's specialisms are in information and communication technology (ICT) and the Built Environment.

The majority of students are of White British heritage, and a very small number are learning to speak English as an additional language. A higher than average proportion of students, almost one-third, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and 18 of these have a statement of special educational need. Over 40% of students are eligible for free school meals, well above the national average. Eighty per cent of sixth form students receive the education maintenance allowance. The academy has experienced some student mobility, particularly during this academic year with in-year arrivals of 34 students since September.

### Achievement and standards

Students' attainment on entry to the academy is below and in some year groups well below the national average. The academy has maintained and further consolidated an upward trend in students' achievement over the last three years, both in the predecessor school and since gaining academy status. The rate of improvement is above local and national trends.

The academy's first set of results from national Key Stage 3 tests in 2008 in mathematics and science were broadly in line with its challenging targets. Targets in ICT were exceeded but performance fell short of targets in English. A subsequent review of English provision by senior leaders prompted swift action to secure the improving standards now being seen in the subject.

At Key Stage 4 in 2008, the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose to 63%, which is in line with the national average. Importantly, the proportion achieving this measure with English and mathematics included was 43%, just 4% below national average. This represents very good and sometimes outstanding progress for those young people based on their previous attainment at Key Stage 2. Analysis of the performance of different groups of learners shows that no groups underachieved. The academy's staff are working hard to maintain improvements in the 2009 examination results through a wide range of tried and tested strategies. These include significant intervention group work, and support and

mentoring for those students who may otherwise find it very difficult to reach their full potential. Recent assessments indicate that the academy is on target to match or exceed its challenging targets for GCSE performance in 2009.

Leaders' detailed analysis of test and examination data enables the academy to identify weaknesses in the performance of different subjects and investigate any underlying factors, for example in teaching and learning or curriculum organisation that contribute to this, so that action is taken to remedy these. The academy is aware that students' achievement at the higher Level 6 in Key Stage 3 and at GCSE grades A\* to A remains well below average, and there is a determination to increase these features in action plans for future improvement.

The academy has rigorous systems for setting individual targets for students and tracking their progress. However, better use could be made of data when planning lessons and marking books, to more consistently meet the full range of students' needs and abilities. This is also important when considering the increase in the number of students arriving mid-year into various year groups. A high proportion of these have difficulties which affect their learning, making it particularly important that their needs are taken into account at an early stage.

#### Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of most students is good in lessons and around the academy. The pastoral team provide good support to those students whose behaviour has been identified as a concern, enabling them to participate in lessons and take advantage of the learning opportunities. In most lessons students have good attitudes to their learning and positive relationships with staff. In a minority of lessons learning is slower due to a small number of students who misbehave. The number of fixed-term exclusions is lower than the previous academic year and there has been one permanent exclusion. The behaviour mentors and the pastoral team work effectively to encourage students to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They are having some success in reducing the fixed-term exclusion rate for some learners. Students are also encouraged to stay in learning through alternative provision such as work placements and courses suited to their individual needs.

Attendance is below the national average. It is highest in Key Stage 3 and lowest in Year 10. The academy's rewards system through the attendance challenges that it offers is successful in reducing absences. There are effective systems to monitor attendance so that the academy has good knowledge and understanding of the reasons why students are absent. Staff work closely with families and students to help improve attendance. The academy has placed a high priority on this area of its work, allocating considerable resources and appointing a family support worker who makes first day phone calls to families. These resources, the use of modified timetables, and the provision of counselling support have had a positive effect on the attendance of a number of students. However, despite the academy's best efforts some students continue to be absent persistently and fixed penalty notices

have had limited impact. The attendance figures have also been affected by the admission of new students this academic year who have poor attendance records, some because of health reasons. The attendance of some learners is low and this is adversely affecting their achievement.

Students who spoke to inspectors expressed positive views about the academy and commented that any incidents of misbehaviour or bullying are dealt with well and that students generally feel happy and safe. Students enjoy the incentive opportunities to earn rewards, trips and vouchers, for example for good attendance. Inspectors noted that most students are respectful and well-mannered, keen to talk to adults and offer their own views or ask questions.

### Quality of provision

Teaching and learning was good in the majority of the 29 lessons observed during the monitoring visit. There has been a clear drive to improve the quality of teaching and many teachers speak enthusiastically about the strategies that they are employing to engage learners and to develop their skills. This is led well strategically by the senior vice-principal and a group of 'expert teachers' who are engaged in developing their own skills and cascading good practice through informal and formal means. The academy is making good use of external consultants and opportunities for staff to work together in groups to develop their skills. This unified drive for improvement is exemplified in the common planning format used by teachers and in the effective monitoring of the quality of provision. Teachers are open to reflect on their own practice to improve the quality of the provision for the students.

Common strengths in lessons are positive relationships, the enthusiasm of the teachers and the planning of activities designed to engage the learners. In lessons that were good or better, a wide range of activities and timed tasks led to lessons that moved along at a fast pace and captured the interests of learners. What students were going to learn and what they were expected to achieve by the end of the lesson was made clear to them. Effective questioning stretched learners' understanding and there were opportunities for students to evaluate their own and others' learning, which helped clarify what they needed to do to improve. Independent learning is fostered across the academy and there is a strong emphasis on students developing an awareness of their own learning. These skills are particularly well promoted in the core competency lessons in Year 7. In these lessons students are encouraged to learn, to think and to talk about their learning. However, on some occasions the emphasis on developing learning skills overshadowed the need to ensure that it led to good gains in students' knowledge and understanding of the subject or theme being taught.

In lessons that were less successful, the non-participation of some students was tolerated. In these lessons work was not as well matched to their varied starting points and this resulted in students making slower progress and sometimes led to low level disruptive or distracted behaviour. Where teachers' management of

behaviour was weak, such lessons resulted in limited learning for a significant minority of students in the class.

The quality of oral feedback to students about their learning is generally good in the classroom but the quality of teachers' written marking varies. Students' presentation of their work in some books is poor, with book covers marred by graffiti. When written feedback is good, it provides informative guidance on students' progress against National Curriculum levels or course grades and the next steps required to achieve higher levels or grades. In some cases written marking is infrequent and less informative, thereby providing limited information on progress and next steps.

The academy continues to review and modify its curriculum in response to students' changing needs. Medium term plans identify key themes and activities and individual lessons are planned with clear structure and precision. Students' thinking is stimulated and deepened by the exploration of philosophy and they develop good skills in collaborative work. The use of ICT and the encouragement to students to take responsibility for their own learning is helping to promote independence and enjoyment. Students are assessed against their progress in National Curriculum subjects as well as their attainment and effort in cross-curricular project work and they maintain a useful weekly record of their activity and skills. The assessment of personal learning and thinking skills is a continuing area for development. The Year 8 thematic approach to linking subjects under the school's specialist theme of construction and the built environment has not been so successful and teaching has remained subject based. However the productive work of the Year 7 team is now being built upon to extend the competency curriculum framework into Year 8. The school has identified key strands for a Key Stage 3 literacy programme for students with weaknesses in reading and writing but it is at an early stage of development. Plans are in place to ensure that students are able to experience music as part of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, as the academy has been unable to recruit a specialist teacher.

Key Stage 4 provides a wider curriculum range than that of the predecessor school, although it is constrained by low numbers. An appropriate range of vocational courses are provided in ICT, health and social care, catering, construction and physical education (PE). Steps have been taken to ensure that students who gain Level 6 in science at Key Stage 3 will be able to take three separate sciences from September 2009. Early entry for GCSE exams is used effectively to promote good achievement in English.

Vocational options include a well established construction course run in partnership with other local schools which enables students to gain foundation level skills and provides good access to further training at college. Plans are in place for a higher level Diploma in construction and the built environment but students have not yet been recruited to this course. One difficulty reported by the academy is that successful students in Year 9 have a range of academic interests and many may be

unwilling to make a large commitment of time to a new area of learning at the expense of a number of subjects they know and like. The school's specialism in construction and the built environment remains relatively underdeveloped. The provision for ICT is a strength of the school's specialist provision because of the range of vocational courses offered and in the extensive use of laptop computers that promotes independent learning.

There is a good range of after-school sports and arts activities and clubs. Students have opportunities to visit art galleries and museums and the Lake District as part of their learning in art, science and geography. The Aim Higher programme and a number of activities for gifted and talented students widen their experience and develop their aspirations for higher education. Extra-curricular support is also provided for students to develop their literacy skills and self-esteem. Students have the opportunity to attend an army residential week as one of the options for their work experience in Year 10.

### Leadership and management

The principal is a strong and motivational leader who has a clear view of the future of the academy. In partnership with the vice-principals, he articulates high expectations to which staff respond readily, in the knowledge that their efforts and successes will be recognised and celebrated and their professional development needs will be met. Together with the assistant principals, this comprises a senior leadership team that is very capable and committed, ensuring that all staff, and to a growing extent students, share those high expectations of their work. The skills of middle leaders are also developing well as they have an accurate knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement in their departments. Key features of the academy's ethos are the collegiality and 'can do' approach of staff, and their commitment to and knowledge about each individual student.

Governors bring a range of experience and knowledge to their role and are beginning to provide an appropriate level of challenge to leaders to help raise performance. They acknowledge that there is scope to develop their skills further through training opportunities, and ensuring that individual governors are equipped to take on responsibilities for overseeing particular aspects of the academy's work. Along with the leadership team, governors are keen to build on emerging strengths in the academy's contribution to outreach work, training and development across other secondary schools in the area.

The academy's development plans are well focused on key priorities for improvement, particularly on the achievement of challenging targets, and are reviewed regularly. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the academy's work, against clear success criteria, include the analysis of information on students' progress and action is taken promptly where potential underperformance is found. The impact of these actions is then evaluated through further assessments of gains in students' learning, and this is linked to improving classroom practice.

The combination of high staff morale, well focused professional development and distributed leadership is building a strong capacity for improvement. The principal's vision and forward thinking, particularly in developing and appointing staff with an eye on succession planning, is ensuring that improvements are secure and sustainable.

## Sixth Form

St. Anne's Academy's new sixth form opened in September 2008 and is at an early stage of development. It recruited approximately 60 students and has retained 90% of these over the first year. It is on track to recruit similar numbers for September 2009. The prior attainment of students is lower than generally found in school sixth forms. The opening of the sixth form has contributed to a significant reduction in the proportion of students who would have left the predecessor school without entering any other education, training or employment.

The director of sixth form is a key member of the academy's senior leadership team and has a clear view of the progress being made in the sixth form and where further development is needed. The range of courses that are provided is limited but a wider range of options is available within the academy's collaborative arrangements with its two partner schools or the local further education college. The range of academic and vocational choices generally meets the needs and aspirations of students. Of the students who started courses at other schools, a few in the first term transferred to courses at the academy. This was caused partly by students finding it difficult to feel at home as a part-time student travelling to an unfamiliar institution. The good quality pastoral care at the academy provides students with a high level of individual support which they value greatly. The pastoral leader of the sixth form effectively promotes good relationships, personal development and positive activity in the sixth form. Attendance is satisfactory, although there is some lack of punctuality. Students have good opportunities to take on responsibilities as teaching assistants in the academy. The students are being mentored well to make more effective use of independent study time and all have laptops. The tutorial programme provides an effective and developing programme of visits to universities and businesses. Students have been on international as well as local trips and they are regularly involved in charity events and fund raising. Students have good opportunities to contribute their views informally. Although a sixth form council is planned, it has not yet been formally instituted.

Students taking the AS mathematics course gained disappointing results in their first formal assessment in January 2009 which were below their target grades. Leaders promptly identified weaknesses in examination preparation and homework which have been tackled with vigour. The latest assessments show that these students are now reaching their target grades. This event triggered a rigorous review of sixth form teaching and learning, involving lesson observations and the moderation of assessments by subject teachers from other sixth form partner schools. The

outcomes of this well executed quality assurance exercise were positive and the moderated assessments in the AS-level courses in English, drama, art and the ICT Diploma show that students are generally on track to achieve their targets. Early evidence indicates that students are making satisfactory progress in their courses at other schools, although progress in psychology appears to be variable and the academy is investigating this further.

### External support

The academy makes good use of mutually beneficial links with external partners. Outreach work by the principal and other staff enables the sharing of good practice between the academy and other schools in the local area. Positive links exist with the local authority, with some services such as human resources support being bought in by the academy. The local authority engages the expertise of the principal to provide support to another school within the Greater Manchester Challenge area. The academy is also involved in the national 'Future Leaders' initiative. The principal has a clear plan to ensure that the benefits of committing to this project will outweigh any potential disadvantages of taking up key leaders' time. Funding provided by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust is used effectively to facilitate the academy's development work with a research-based project focused on improving teaching and learning strategies.

The school improvement partner's useful termly reports provide an accurate overview of the academy's growing successes and indicate a good level of challenge for further improvement.

### Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality and consistency of teachers' marking and use of assessment information, both to inform lesson planning and to ensure that all students are clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Develop the newly-established sixth form provision to further improve outcomes for post-16 students.
- Develop the specialist subjects to make these more prominent across the academy and ensure that they make an effective contribution to improving students' overall achievement.

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

Marguerite McCloy  
Her Majesty's Inspector