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13 July 2012

Mr J McParland  
The Principal  
The John Wallis Church of England Academy  
Millbank Road  
Ashford  
Kent  
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Dear Mr McParland

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The John Wallis Church of England Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Patricia Metham, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 10 and 11 July 2012, 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 and other members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, members of the governing body, parents and carers, and five groups of students. Telephone discussions took place with sponsors and the principal's former mentor. Inspectors observed thirteen parts of lessons taught by fourteen teachers. In addition, a number of lessons were visited by inspectors to focus on the progress of specific groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs.

### **Context**

Since the academy's opening in September 2010, there has been a turnover in staff of about 50%, including all but one of the senior leadership team. The number on roll is steadily increasing. A new sixth form opened in September 2011, admitting students into Year 12. Changes to the leadership structure are planned from

September 2012. A new school building project is due to commence in January 2013. Plans are also underway for the academy to become an all-through 3 to 19 academy from 1 September 2012, when a neighbouring primary school closes at the end of this academic year. The academy's specialisms are mathematics and technology. The academy is sponsored by Kent County Council, The Diocese of Canterbury, Canterbury Christ Church University and Benenden School.

There are currently 842 students on roll. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. A below-average proportion of students come from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is broadly average. The academy has an above-average proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.

### **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

Students enter the academy with prior levels of attainment which are significantly below the national average, with the gap widening in recent years. In 2011, students' attainment was low in GCSE examinations, matching the standards achieved by the final Year 11 group of the predecessor school. During the first year of the academy, leaders took decisive action in order to address the many existing barriers to learning, with the aim of securing real and meaningful academic progress in subsequent years. This was particularly challenging in the absence of heads of English and mathematics. Current available data provided by the academy, which include results already secured, forecast a sharp increase in the proportion of students set to gain five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and mathematics, bringing them much closer to last year's national average.

This accelerated rate of progress continues for students in Year 10. The academy has set itself challenging targets and developed sophisticated systems for tracking the progress of individual students to ensure that underachievement is identified much earlier than in the past. Whilst gaps in attainment between different groups are narrowing in most cases, students known to be eligible for free school meals, as well as disabled students and those with special educational needs, achieve less well than other students in the academy. A highly developed and well-targeted intervention programme is securing improved standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Indeed, a drive on literacy and the impact of phonics including the well-targeted use of a commercial programme using ICT are having a noticeable impact on improving students' reading ages. Students in Year 12 express a high level of satisfaction about their achievement, although there is some variation in performance between different subject areas.

### **The quality of teaching**

The development of the teaching team has been a high priority as the academy grows. The impact of the principal's drive to improve the quality of teaching is demonstrated through improved students' outcomes and the virtual eradication of

inadequate teaching. The proportion of good and outstanding teaching has increased significantly over time. However, around half of the teaching remains satisfactory. In lessons where the quality of teaching is good or outstanding, teachers demonstrate a strong awareness of the needs of different groups of students and plan skilfully-designed tasks which challenge all learners whatever their ability. This effective teaching is making a positive contribution towards narrowing gaps in attainment between different groups of learners. Many teachers are making better use of assessment and students report they find this useful in helping them to know at what level they are working and how to achieve their targets. Effective use of questioning, which requires detailed responses from students, is becoming a commonly-used strategy of better teaching. In the remaining lessons where teaching is satisfactory, teachers do not plan sufficiently for the needs of different groups of students. Consequently, all students often do the same work and their rate of progress is less rapid. Although teachers' verbal feedback in lessons is improving, the quality of written feedback in students' books varies in quality. While much marking is detailed and indicates very clearly what students have to do to move up to the next level of attainment, some marking is lacking in depth. Hence, some students do not understand how they can improve the quality of their work. Inspectors observed increasing use of self- and peer-assessment in a number of lessons. Additional adults in the classroom, including learning mentors, teaching assistants and sixth form students, make a positive contribution towards accelerating students' progress.

Teachers' stronger relationships with students and a marked improvement in students' attitudes towards learning have created a community which respects the values of others. Teaching promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, particularly, but not exclusively, through the provision for religious education.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students, staff and parents and carers comment positively on the 'massive improvement' in students' behaviour in the academy. A combination of high expectations, initial zero tolerance, and consistently personalised support from adults, has successfully changed the culture of the academy. Inspectors observed consistently orderly behaviour both in lessons and around the academy. The academy has supported students with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties well, securing positive attitudes towards learning and achievement. Students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to underachievement believe the academy does all it can to support them. One student said of the staff, 'The teachers are there for you. They will put hours into helping us.' Students are taught well on how to recognise different forms of bullying and take decisive steps to prevent it from happening. Students report that instances of bullying are now extremely rare and any that are reported to staff are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Racial and homophobic incidents are also rare and students told inspectors that learners of all ethnic backgrounds relate very well to one another. The introduction of a behaviour logging incident system, which records any incidents of unacceptable

behaviour through the effective use of ICT, has raised the profile of acceptable behaviour, and the rewards which it attracts. A full-time attendance officer has supported the academy in its implementation of its attendance policy. As a result, students' attendance is improving over time.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the academy**

The inspirational principal, as well as other key leaders and managers, consistently communicates high expectations. Following a challenging first year, in which leaders, managers and members of the governing body made a concerted effort to deal with a legacy of underachievement and very poor behaviour, the impact of a more strategic approach and judicious decision making is now much in evidence. The senior leadership team is seen as a cohesive, supportive and strategic group, who are driving up standards in the academy. Middle leaders are proactive and held to account more effectively, and the proposed changes to the 'leading and learning' structure from September 2012 are planned to further strengthen capacity and accountability at all levels of leadership. Self-evaluation processes at whole-school and departmental level are accurate and correctly identify whole-school priorities. The rigorous management of teaching has had a clear impact on students' learning experience in the classroom. There is a clear link between the monitoring of teachers' performance, target setting and professional development, all of which inform academy improvement planning.

The curriculum is still evolving, but is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all students. A range of curriculum alternatives, facilitated through a range of courses and qualifications, is securing improved outcomes for students. Vocational provision is particularly well respected and the intensive tuition carried out in the academy's Carmel Centre has been effective in engaging students at risk of permanent exclusion. Programmes of study at Key Stage 3 have served to strengthen literacy and to develop students' personal, learning and thinking skills. Courses in the sixth form are appropriately matched to the range of learning needs of the increasing proportion of students who choose to pursue their studies in the academy. The academy's dual specialisms of mathematics and technology are used well to develop students' numeracy and communication skills. The improved extra-curricular provision has served to broaden students' experience and has successfully raised their self-esteem. The truly inclusive curriculum meets the needs of all students well, including disabled students and those with special educational needs. The relentless focus by leaders, managers and governors on performance, by trends over time and by different groups of students, ensures that equal opportunities have a high profile in the academy. The academy is engaging an increasing proportion of parents and carers in their children's education. The pastoral team has been particularly effective in liaising with parents and carers through a range of interventions including home visits and the provision of parenting classes

## **External support**

Leaders are making effective use of support from a wide range of sources. The sponsors are particularly effective in providing support when required. For example, newly qualified teachers have recently undertaken a school improvement based project, in conjunction with Canterbury Christ Church University, which has served to enhance the provision. Staff and students from Benenden School have worked closely with the academy to strengthen the quality of learning and teaching. Kent County Council continues to guide the academy as the maintaining education authority.

## **Main Judgements**

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Continue to narrow any remaining gaps in attainment, particularly for those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by further refining the use of personalised learning strategies in the classroom.
- Ensure that the quality of all teachers' marking is as good as the very best.

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

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**