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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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John McParland
Principal
The John Wallis Church of England Academy
Millbank Road
Kingsnorth
Ashford
Kent
TN23 3HG

Dear Mr McParland

Short inspection of The John Wallis Church of England Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 11 September 2018 with Ian Bauckham OI and Christopher Donovan OI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the academy was judged to be good in January 2014.

This academy continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. As principal, you lead by example and inspire loyalty from staff and pupils. Staff and leaders leave 'no stone unturned' in their determination to raise pupils' aspirations and improve their prospects. The academy's increasingly strong reputation is making a positive impact in the whole community.

Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching and learning has been strengthened and pupils' progress has been sustained. Leaders have improved the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good. You have continued to develop the academy's sixth form. More students are succeeding in their courses than at the time of the last inspection, including those who start A-level courses with lower than usual starting points. The academy's primary phase now provides a securely good quality of education. Leaders have made sure that the newly introduced curriculum focuses on exactly what pupils need to learn to catch up and make good progress.

The John Wallis Academy is a happy place of learning. It is a safe haven of peace and positive values. Pupils feel known, cared for and loved. They are proud of the academy and most live up to its high expectations. Staff and pupils commented on the warm and supportive family atmosphere that extends beyond the academy gate. Inspectors were struck by the amount of contact and tenacity that staff put into reaching parents and the community, particularly those families experiencing difficulties.

Most parents who spoke to inspectors or who contributed to Parent View support the academy and are pleased with what it offers to their children. Many commented on the progress that their children were making and on your caring and approachable staff. A very small number of parents feel that communication from the academy is not as frequent or timely as they would like. However, inspectors did not identify serious concerns about communication.

Governors and sponsors are astute and carry out their duties diligently. Since the last inspection, they have further developed their skills and depth of knowledge of the academy and its context. As one governor remarked, 'We don't just believe what we are told about the academy, we test it out.'

You and your team have wisely identified that there is still work to do. You are rightly committed to improving pupils' attendance, which remains below national figures for primary and secondary schools. You are also working to ensure that the curriculum is completely appropriate for all pupils, especially the most able and those who have behavioural difficulties or special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

All arrangements for safeguarding are meticulous, including record keeping and the checks made on adults working in the academy. Safeguarding leaders are highly experienced and accomplished. They work closely together and are not afraid to challenge each other, review their own work objectively and act upon lessons learned in order to protect children. Safeguarding leaders know the community well and are alert to any local risks. They work productively and supportively with families and other agencies, putting pupils first. Leaders have no hesitation in pursuing cases with the local authority if they feel that actions to help children have not been effective or timely.

Governors oversee safeguarding arrangements assiduously. Staff training in all aspects of safeguarding and child protection is thoroughly up to date and in line with current guidance. All staff are confident that if they raise any concerns about a pupil, these will be dealt with promptly and appropriately.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on the following key lines of enquiry: the effectiveness of safeguarding in the academy; whether the academy's approach to improving attendance is bringing about improvements; and whether pupils' behaviour is being managed effectively to reduce fixed-term exclusions. We agreed to review the academy's improving outcomes for sixth form students and the curriculum on offer, which was an area for improvement from the last inspection. We also focused on whether the quality of teaching, learning and assessment had become consistently strong, in both the primary and secondary phases. Finally, we reviewed how leadership across the whole academy was being developed in the primary and secondary phases and whether the design of the secondary phase curriculum was having a positive impact on improving pupils' progress.

- Attendance in both the primary and secondary phases of the academy remains stubbornly below national figures and is rightly a key focus for improvement in the academy's development plan. There is no doubt that leaders are tenacious in their pursuit of improved attendance. This is having an impact on attendance and showing improvement, notably in the primary phase. Nevertheless, there is a core of poor attenders within the academy and some families' entrenched casual attitudes to good attendance are proving hard to change.
- Academy leaders' approach to improving pupils' behaviour is successful. Well-designed curriculum programmes for pupils whose behaviour causes concern are leading to lower rates of exclusions than previously. The academy prides itself on never giving up on pupils. Staff and leaders find ways to help pupils learn respect and self-control, stay safe within the academy and be well prepared for the next stage of their education. Inspectors observed pupils' good behaviour in lessons and around the academy. Their relationships with staff and each other are considerate and respectful.
- The sixth form has grown and been consolidated since the last inspection. The principal and his team are committed to providing students with broad choices and the right A-level and vocational courses. The academy's approach is working and outcomes are improving. It is clear that the sixth-form provision is raising aspirations for students and the community. The number of students gaining university places has grown quickly over the last few years. Academy leaders are rightly proud that many students are the first in their families to enter higher education.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have closely monitored teaching and learning, ensuring that they appoint dedicated staff with strong subject knowledge. New and experienced teachers benefit from high-quality training and professional development. As a result, teachers are skilled in asking searching questions. They respond insightfully to pupils' answers and draw out their knowledge and understanding. Pupils are given lots of chances to practise and recall key information and, as a result, their confidence increases. Standards and expectations are consistently high and pupils have confidence in their teachers.
- Senior leaders have made sure that subject, year and phase leaders take more responsibility for their areas since the last inspection. These leaders monitor the work of their departments and phases, create their own action plans and have a voice in the academy's onward improvement planning. In this way, all leaders are contributing to the secure and stable quality of education provided by the academy as it has grown in size and ambition.
- In the primary phase, leaders correctly identified that children joining the early years have gaps in their vocabulary. Some pupils have been held back because of shortfalls in their early language development so their true potential has been disguised. In order to help children and pupils to catch up, primary phase leaders have developed a new curriculum to focus on language acquisition. It is early days, but it is encouraging to observe the early positive impact being made by the academy's consistent approach to developing children's spoken language and vocabulary.
- With typical attention to detail, academy leaders take time to review the curriculum and make changes where needed. Pupils are provided with good guidance about what subjects to choose for their options and whether academic or vocational courses are

suitable for their ambitions and abilities. Over time, throughout the academy, pupils make sustained good progress in English, mathematics and their other subject choices.

- However, academy leaders have identified that teaching staff need to take more account of the most able pupils in their classes and to ensure that these pupils are sufficiently challenged to attain highly. Inspectors agreed and noted that in a few cases, teachers are not building enough upon pupils' obvious prior knowledge. As standards in the academy have risen, there are more pupils who are able to tackle harder work than they are given and to capitalise on their growth in knowledge and understanding. In particular, academy leaders have rightly focused on developing the curriculum in order to increase rates of progress in knowledge and skills for pupils in Years 7 and 8. Leaders are determined to ensure that this time is not wasted but contributes fully to pupils' overall secondary education.
- For a small number of pupils, carefully structured alternative programmes are provided. These combine necessary academic subjects with vocational courses, to help prepare pupils for employment or further education. Leaders are rightly reviewing how they can continue to offer similarly challenging and relevant programmes for those pupils who are experiencing difficulties with their behaviour and mental health.

Next steps for the academy

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the academy's work to improve pupils' attendance is effective by changing parents' and pupils' attitudes to reducing absence for individuals and groups
- children and pupils acquire better spoken language skills and vocabulary in the primary phase
- the curriculum and teaching provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils and take account of what pupils already know, understand and can do throughout the academy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Canterbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team met with you, your team of senior leaders, representatives from the governing body, groups of pupils from all phases, middle leaders and staff. Accompanied by senior leaders, we visited a range of lessons in the primary and secondary phases, spoke to pupils and looked at the work they were completing.

We discussed recent performance data, plans for the curriculum and pupils' current progress. A meeting was held to review the effectiveness of safeguarding in the academy and the lead inspector considered the academy's records of referrals to the local authority children's services. Inspectors met with leaders to discuss the sixth-form provision.

Another meeting was held to review the academy's records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. The views of 113 parents who contributed to Parent View, and their free text comments, were taken into account, alongside other evidence. An inspector spoke to parents collecting children from the primary phase at the end of the day. The lead inspector spoke to one parent on the telephone and also had a telephone conversation with the academy's improvement partner.