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4 November 2011

Mrs Helen McEvoy  
The Nuneaton Academy  
Radnor Drive  
Nuneaton  
CV10 7PD

Dear Mrs McEvoy

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Nuneaton Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit to your academy with David Martin HMI on 2 and 3 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, staff, groups of students and the Chair of the Executive Board.

### **Context**

Most of the 1205 students, including 44 in the sixth form, are White British. Nearly 20% of students are known to be eligible for free school meals, a broadly average proportion. Just under a quarter of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of those who have a statement of special educational needs is just below the national average. The small but growing number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is also below average as are those who speak English as an additional language. Few students join or leave the academy other than at the usual times. When opened in September 2010, the academy operated on both sites of the predecessor schools until September 2011 when it moved to one site, at which time the sixth form was established. Approximately two thirds of teaching staff joined the academy from the predecessor schools. The current Principal has been in post since January 2011. Since March 2011 there has been

considerable restructuring and reorganisation of staff and staffing structures, particularly at senior management level. The academy is sponsored by North Warwickshire and Hinckley College.

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

In 2010, attainment was low with 30% of the students securing five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. Of the current Year 11 students 42% gained five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics in unvalidated 2011 results. The academy's prediction was realistic, reflecting students' low starting points. While students' prior attainment is low overall, the leadership team recognises that students do not yet make fast enough progress to address their previously low achievement. Attainment for current students, while still low, is rising rapidly in English but less quickly in mathematics. Girls are achieving significantly better than boys. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the small but growing number of those from minority ethnic groups are making good progress in English, but uneven progress in mathematics. The academy's work to address the exceptionally low literacy levels of some students in Years 7 and 8 is proving to be increasingly successful in raising overall achievement. Linked to this, work to improve the language skills of those who speak English as an additional language is having a significant impact in raising their achievement across the curriculum. Consequently, attainment for these students is better than it was in previous years.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Attendance is average in Years 7 to 9 and low in Years 10 and, most notably, Year 11. Although attendance is rising, it remains low overall. The proportion of students who are persistent absentees has been high, but is beginning to improve. This is because the academy has a multi-level approach to improving attendance. It is using a wide range of strategies to encourage all students to attend regularly, including positive rewards, contacting homes on the first-day of unexplained absence and students and their parents and carers receiving a 'wish you were here' card when taking unauthorised leave. The academy does not, however, shy away from taking legal action when and if appropriate. Staff investigate absenteeism quickly and tenaciously. The academy benefits from the effective deployment of the educational welfare officer. While such strategies are having a positive impact in raising attendance in Years 7 to 9, they are yet to be fully effective for older students.

Both staff and students say that behaviour is much improved as is punctuality. Behaviour observed by inspectors, both in lessons and around the academy, is generally good. Exclusions, both the number of incidents and days lost, are falling and now compare favourably with those of other local schools. This is well supported by the academy's recently established internal isolation arrangements for those who are at risk of exclusion. Students also spoke enthusiastically about the positive

impact of the recently introduced mixed-age grouping system for tutor periods on students' overall attitudes and behaviour. 'Student voice', which provides students with opportunities to influence academy decision making and which the Principal is looking to develop further, is also beginning to play an increasing role in aspects of the academy's work.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Inspectors' observations of lessons confirmed the senior staff's judgments of the quality of teaching and learning across the academy. Observations showed that, although teaching is improving, it remains predominantly satisfactory with an increasing proportion of lessons judged as good. However, there are still lessons where teaching is inadequate. The most significant common shortcomings that prevent much of the teaching being better than satisfactory include a lack of challenge in lessons where teachers' detailed planning does not always match what they actually deliver. On occasion, teachers talk for too long, students are given too few opportunities to share their ideas with their peers and the pace of learning is slow. Consequently, students become restless or, sometimes, passive. In these lessons, teachers still tend to dominate by giving over-lengthy explanations and instructions and do not draw an extended response from students by questioning their understanding. In the best lessons, students are expected to take greater responsibility for their learning and are encouraged to be more independent. In an English lesson, for example, students were asked to discuss and present their reasons why certain characters from a play they had been studying should, or should not, be thrown out of a hot-air balloon. Students effectively used examples from the play to argue their case. The rest of the class used the GCSE assessment criteria to judge the performance on how well students engaged and entertained the audience and whether they communicated and listened to each other. This helped them to consider how best to communicate complex processes to their peers in preparation for the final examination. However, the leaders and managers know that the proportion of good teaching observed is not enough to raise attainment with sufficient speed, given students' low starting points.

Although more teachers are planning their lessons in detail and making better use of the assessment information about their students, this is not always used effectively enough in lessons. Consequently, teachers do not always meet the needs of individual students. In the most effective lessons seen, teachers shared examination grade criteria with students and often provided examples to enable all to work at different levels. This helped individual students to improve and make better progress. In the most effective lessons, the use of support staff and resources is closely tailored to the needs of groups or individuals, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, and better progress results.

The curriculum covers all that is required, with an appropriate emphasis on literacy, particularly for those in Years 7 and 8, and the provision of an alternative curriculum for those in Years 10 and 11 who have difficulty learning in mainstream lessons. The academy acknowledges that although the curriculum is enriched with some extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors, these are limited at present. The academy is currently undertaking a review of the sixth form curriculum to make it more responsive to students' learning needs. Other strategies to help raise attainment are well conceived. For example, more curriculum time is now devoted to English in Years 7 and 8 to improve students' literacy skills. The academy's specialisms in engineering and science are not yet fully developed to have the impact intended on progress and attainment.

Pastoral care has improved and teachers have positive relationships with students. All are well cared for and the academy supports them and their families. Good use is made of external support when needed. Students know the adults at the academy care about them and feel confident to approach them if they have any worries.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers**

The strength of the leadership provided by the Principal, ably supported by the senior leadership team and the governing body, is a key element in the academy's improvement since January 2011. The Principal has a clear vision for the academy, which puts the needs of all students at the heart of its inclusive approach. Students are valued, and those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable are nurtured well. Staff, particularly at senior leadership level, share a passionate belief in improving the life chances of all the students. All adults work very hard to ensure that the academy continues its upward trajectory of improvement and are determined to tackle the academy's relative weaknesses. This approach is clearly recognised by the students and their parents and carers. They appreciate the strong and positive ethos that promotes equal opportunities well, in relation to both academic success and personal and social development. The senior leadership team is rigorous in its regular and accurate monitoring of teaching. The quality of the leadership and management of middle leaders is variable. Where it is effective, it has driven upwards the attainment of students of all abilities. However, many subject self-evaluations are at an early stage of development and are not always sharply focused on what students need to do to improve further. Senior leaders are not yet holding middle leaders and managers fully accountable for students' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. The good practice that exists in some subjects is not always shared or built upon consistently by all staff, particularly in marking students' work.

Systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions designed to raise achievement are proving to be effective. This means that some staff are better able to identify aspects of provision which are working less well so that necessary adjustments can be made quickly. Firm senior leadership and the improvements

made so far, demonstrate that the academy's capacity for sustained improvement has been strengthened and is satisfactory.

The academy's short-term improvement plan focuses, rightly, on the key priority of raising attainment, particularly in English and mathematics. This includes effective planning with regard to provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with low levels of literacy. However, the longer-term plan is not sharply focused with clearly defined and measurable long-term targets or interim milestones. Recent restructuring and reorganisation of the senior leadership team are already having a clear impact in securing improvements, particularly in teaching and learning and assessment procedures.

### **External support**

External consultants, commissioned by the Principal, to provide a baseline judgment for assessment, teaching and learning and the effectiveness of middle leadership helped to launch helpful developments from January 2011. The more recent use of external consultants to verify the academy's judgments on the quality of teaching and learning has also benefited its work towards eradicating inadequate teaching. Leaders and managers also benefit from support from representatives of the academy's sponsor. This external support and the incisive analysis and challenge provided by the senior leadership team are helping to strengthen middle leaders' self-evaluation and to raise the students' overall attainment.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons in all subject areas so that students' achievement and attainment accelerate more rapidly by:
  - ensuring that all lessons provide good pace and challenge for students of all abilities
  - ensuring the quality and consistency of marking and assessment clearly shows students how well they have done and what it is that they need to do to improve
  - making sure that teachers use students' responses to questions to develop key teaching points and draw others into discussion
  - using information known about students to match the work more closely to their needs

- Ensure that middle leaders are held fully accountable for students' progress and the quality of teaching and learning in their areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc           Mike Motley, Chair of the Governing Body  
              The Academies Group, DfE [[colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk)]