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8 March 2012

Mr C Mallaband
Principal
St Mark's Church of England Academy
Acacia Road
Mitcham
CR4 1SF

Dear Mr Mallaband

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour: monitoring inspection of St Mark's Church of England Academy.

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your academy on 7 March 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Could you also convey our thanks to the students we spoke to, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the representative from the local diocese.

Five of the eleven middle managers are new in post since the last inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 28 September 2010, the academy was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the academy has made good progress in making improvements and the effectiveness of the academy in improving pupils' behaviour is satisfactory.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In 2011, students' attainment rose considerably. The proportion of students who attained five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics exceeded the government's floor target for the first time in three years. Although attainment has risen, it still remains low. The progress students made in their learning in 2011 was good as students attainment on entry to the school is low. The academy's data indicate that it is on track to exceed the results of 2011 and to close the gap on national attainment. The proportion of pupils set to gain five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics is expected to be around the national average.



In lessons seen, students had good opportunities to discuss their work. Peer and group assessment and discussions form a pivotal part of the good lessons. This results in students having a firm understanding of what is required of them to move on in their learning and achieve better. There was one instance, in a good English lesson, where students undertook roles in their groups well. The added responsibility increased their level of engagement. However, a significant minority of students' learning is satisfactory, as students are not always challenged to do their best in lessons or to work independently on appropriate tasks. Students in Years 10 and 11 know their National Curriculum targets, their current levels of attainment and what they need to do to improve. This is not always the case for students in Years 7, 8 and 9.

The quality of teaching

Since the last inspection, the proportion of good teaching has improved significantly but a significant minority of teaching is still satisfactory because it is not securing good learning. In the stronger lessons, the good pace, along with high-level probing questions, enables students to enjoy learning and do their best. For example, in a good religious education lesson, four students presented their arguments on the topic of crime and punishment to their peers as part of the lesson's 'ethical courtroom'. Students researched the basis for their presentations quickly and effectively and they spoke articulately. The teacher facilitated the discussions well, which resulted in good, appropriate questions from other students. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long, limiting the time students have to complete activities. Teachers do not routinely use assessment information to plan lessons. In some lessons, teachers' expectations are too low and students are not challenged enough.

In the better lessons, teachers use the curriculum to provide opportunities for students to develop their social, moral, cultural and spiritual skills. There were many good opportunities for students to reflect on their lives and their personal views in a good religious education lesson, for example. Other lessons promoted students' social development well, giving them good opportunities to work in groups and to undertake group roles. In the stronger lessons, teachers' review of how students can improve their National Curriculum levels is undertaken frequently. The quality of marked work and the level of detail given to students in the best lessons seen were good, enabling students to know precisely what they needed to do to improve their work. However, this was not consistent within subjects or across the academy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Since the Principal's arrival at the academy, he has strongly communicated the academy's 'zero tolerance' attitude to poor behaviour. As a consequence, the proportion of students who receive fixed-term exclusions is higher than the national average. Students spoken to during the inspection say that behaviour in lessons and



around the academy has significantly improved. Heads of department are now responsible for resolving behaviour issues as a first-level response. As a result, students know that there are clear sanctions for poor behaviour which can escalate if their behaviour does not improve. Inspectors saw very few instances of poor behaviour around the academy or in lessons. In the very few lessons where low-level disturbances were seen, teaching was satisfactory and not challenging students to do their best. Attendance has remained broadly average. The academy knows which groups are persistently absent and are focusing efforts to improve their attendance. The introduction of the new values for the academy of 'love, hope and trust' has given students a stronger sense of social responsibility. As one student said, 'We are more of a community now.'

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The senior leadership team have focused well on improving outcomes for students. The rise in attainment in 2011 and the predicted rise for 2012 are testament to the impact of their actions. They know where the weaknesses remain in the academy; the priority is to improve the quality of teaching which they know will also improve students' behaviour. The academy's self-evaluation has accurately identified its current position and what actions are needed to improve students' achievement further. Initiatives such as the introduction of teaching 'trios' and 'quartets' have given teachers increased opportunities to work together and obtain peer support. This has resulted in improvements in some weaker teaching. Observations of lessons are more robust and the frequency of lesson observations has increased. These measures have yet to demonstrate their full impact in terms of more consistently good teaching.

The monitoring and tracking of students' attainment are rigorous. They have given the academy a clear understanding of where more targeted interventions should be focused. The attainment of individual students is well monitored; however, not enough attention is given to the monitoring of the levels of progress of students or the achievement of groups by ethnicity or other characteristics.

The relatively new tier of middle leadership is held to account for the performance of their subjects and for their contribution to addressing whole-school priorities. Leaders have turned their attention to improving the curriculum. Revisions are planned for Key Stage 3 to develop a more creative curriculum and increase the level of literacy support students receive. Leaders are firmly of the belief that the Key Stage 4 curriculum will continue to be based on students' needs and interest, which will include vocational courses. The governing body has increased its level of monitoring and challenge of the academy's work. Sub-committees of the governing body are closely reviewing the academy's progress in achieving its attainment targets. The academy's sponsor adds an additional layer of scrutiny and support to many areas of the academy's work including teaching and governance.



There have been many initiatives to increasingly seek the views of stakeholders. As a result, two parent governors and a community governor have been appointed to the governing body. Events held for parents and carers have included a consultation evening on the new values of the school.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2010

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to accelerate students' progress and to raise standards, particularly in English, so that they are consistently good, by:
 - ensuring teachers use day-to-day assessments to provide activities that are challenging and are carefully matched to the varied needs of all students, especially for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - asking probing questions in lessons which give students' opportunities to develop and explain their ideas fully, especially for more able students
 - ensuring that lessons are active with an emphasis on students learning in order to increase the pace and accelerate progress.
 - reviewing targets more systematically with students so they clearly understand how to improve.

- Enhance the impact of leaders and managers at all levels school improvement by:
 - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly by setting quantifiable measures against which to evaluate success
 - intensifying the programme for spreading good practice in assessment throughout the academy, by coaching and mentoring.
 - extending the capacity of leaders at all levels still further to manage their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring the governing body seeks the views of stakeholders more systematically and challenges and holds the academy to account with more rigour in order to fulfil its role more effectively.

