

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street T 0300 123 1231
Edgbaston Text Phone: 0161 6188524
Birmingham enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
B15 1LH www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 3289
Direct email: elizabeth.rashvand@serco.com



21 September 2012

Mr Gary Hill
Headteacher
The Phoenix Collegiate
Clarkes Lane
West Bromwich
B71 2BX

Dear Mr Hill

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of The Phoenix Collegiate

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 20 September 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the students I spoke with and to the Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority representative for their time.

Since the time of the last inspection there have been some substantial changes to the leadership of the school. The executive headteacher resigned and you were appointed to the post of interim headteacher from June 2012, having previously been one of the associate headteachers. Twenty five members of staff, including two senior leaders, left the school at the end of the last academic year. Senior leadership responsibilities have been redefined, including the link management of the school's curriculum 'academy' directors. School leaders are currently in discussion with potential sponsors for conversion to academy status. A dedicated literacy centre, staffed by two higher level teaching assistants, opened at the beginning of this term. The school continues to operate on two sites, although with only approximately 100 students on the North Campus.

As a result of the inspection on 25 January 2012, the school 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 school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Observations of learning during the inspection and the school's own records indicate that while the achievement of students remains variable, it is improving. Students spoke positively about having a greater understanding of what they were learning in lessons. Achievement in mathematics for those students who left school in 2012 rose

sharply with a 14 percentage point increase on the previous year's results in the proportion of students making expected progress. While still below the 2011 national average, this is a significant rise. The school's analysis of this data indicates that this substantial rise in progress in mathematics was also the case for those students known to be eligible for free school meals, with all other groups of students also showing improvements. However, the unvalidated results indicate a decline in the overall number of students making expected progress in English in 2012. This proportion is now well below the national average. The school has lodged a formal appeal and is awaiting the outcomes. School leaders are well aware that if the current data are validated it places the school in a vulnerable situation with respect to previous achievement, particularly in English. What is more encouraging is that the school's tracking data show that the progress of students, and groups of students, currently in the school is more rapid. There is also increasing evidence of this in the improving quality of day-to-day teaching. Leaders are clear of the urgency of ensuring that they have robust evidence that current progress measures are being sustained for students, and groups of students, in all year groups across the school. Achievement in the sixth form, again based on unvalidated data, broadly matches that of the previous year.

School leaders have increased the profile of literacy development, for example, in the opening and staffing of the literacy centre, funded by part of the school's pupil premium budget. An initial session in the centre for a group of Year 7 students was used to encourage them to ask questions of each other and to increase their confidence in communicating in front of others. The school's Year 7 'learning to learn' curriculum is also supporting these aspects. It is much too early to establish any impact of the literacy centre. There was inconsistency in how well teachers in subjects across the curriculum gave students opportunities to develop literacy and communication skills in lessons. There was similar inconsistency in how well pupils could apply these skills, for example, in accurately spelling subject-specific words or writing with grammatical accuracy. However, there are positive features such as observed during a Year 9 mathematics lesson where students had to consider the meaning of the word 'misconception' and the implications of this meaning when exploring the volume of prisms.

In the sample of lessons observed during the inspection, the quality of teaching ranged from outstanding to that which requires improvement. The school's increasing base of evidence confirms that while some inadequate teaching remains, the proportion has decreased significantly. There is a direct correlation between the professional development opportunities made available and the overall improving quality of teaching. The willingness and enthusiasm of teachers to engage in this has been crucial to the improvement. School leaders' determination to continue and enhance these opportunities is endorsed by this inspection's findings. The impact of this professional development was evident in the consistency of approach to the planning of lessons, even when the impact of that planning did not result in students making good progress. All lessons observed had been planned to include opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning. In addition,

consideration had been given as to how the planned learning objectives could be used to challenge students of different abilities. There was also evidence in a number of lessons of teachers encouraging students to ask questions of each other about the topic being studied. In the best lessons, this was an integral part. For example, in a Year 8 science lesson, students were researching the human body's immune system and were questioning each other about their findings. In other strong lessons, students used the school's 'question matrix' to formulate increasingly-sophisticated questions that required their peers to think more deeply.

Weaknesses in the quality of teaching continue to include some of those evident at the time of the last inspection. In addition, teachers' planning to challenge and support students of different abilities did not always then transfer into what was happening in the classroom. At times, this meant that all students were completing the same work at the same time, therefore reducing the level of challenge. There were missed opportunities to exploit fully the strategies and resources used by teachers to ensure they were aware of how much students had learned and what aspects of their knowledge and skills still needed to be developed. Students are, at times, too passive. In part, this is due to a lack of confidence. On other occasions, this is because teachers talk for too long or the opportunities planned for engaging students are not taken. In the small sample of lessons, relationships between students and with their teachers were positive. Students also spoke of a more orderly and calm atmosphere during lunchtime in the school canteen.

The headteacher has set a clear direction and high expectations of accountability which focus on the need for the quality of teaching to continue to improve. This is shared and supported by senior leaders and the views of all teaching staff are being sought. There is a framework in place which has added rigour to the school's quality assurance process. Leaders are now poised to be able to gather a broader range of evidence when considering the impact of teaching over time and to then use it to support teachers' professional development needs. Good external support has ensured that senior leaders are making accurate judgements on the quality of teaching and other aspects of provision. A clear action plan is in place to increase the engagement of parents and carers and support has been provided by the local authority, both of which means there have been some improvements. Much of the work has been planned to start this academic year, including a focus on supporting the parents and carers of those students with the lowest levels of literacy. The main focus of strategic development since the time of the inspection has been on improving the quality of day-to-day teaching. Members of the governing body continue to offer strong support and challenge.

The local authority statement of action had been judged fit for purpose. School leaders are positive about the range and quality of support they have received from the local authority and there is clear evidence of impact, for example in improving the quality of teaching. Officers have an accurate view of the school's current situation. Other external support, commissioned by the school, has also supported the school's strategic development.

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

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Further improve the progress students make and enhance their communication skills by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching at the earliest opportunity
 - ensuring students are consistently provided with activities in lessons that relate to their challenging targets
 - increasing the opportunities students have to consider appropriate questions and explain their thinking to others
 - enhancing the opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning, including the presentation of their work to a range of audiences
 - increasing students' involvement in assessing their own work and that of others using a range of assessment criteria
 - fine tuning the monitoring of teaching so that it more fully addresses the quality of students' learning.

- Improve the engagement with parents and carers so they can more effectively support their children's learning.