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12 October 2012

Mr S Luke  
Executive Principal  
Ilminster Avenue E-ACT Academy  
Ilminster Avenue  
Knowle West  
Bristol  
BS4 1BX

Dear Mr Luke

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Ilminster Avenue E-ACT Academy**

Following my visit with Robert Pyner HMI to your academy on 10 and 11 October 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 monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised a wide range of evidence. They looked at a number of documents, including strategic plans, safeguarding arrangements, attendance and assessment data, minutes of the governing body meetings, monitoring and behaviour records and curriculum planning. They held meetings with the head of school, executive principal, governors, staff, and groups of pupils and parents. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of E-ACT, the academy's sponsor. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in the playground and teaching and learning throughout the school in 15 lessons taught by 11 teachers. Some observations were undertaken jointly with the executive principal and head of school. Inspectors heard pupils read and scrutinised their work.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time that the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

## **Context**

In January 2012, E-Act sponsored the establishment of the academy to replace its predecessor school, Ilminster Avenue Primary School, which, at its previous inspection in March 2011, had been judged to require special measures. Since its creation, significant changes have been made to the leadership and management of the academy at all levels. The academy was initially led by a temporary principal and governing body. Subsequently, a permanent head of school was appointed and, in September 2012, a permanent leadership structure and a 'soft' federation with a neighbouring academy with the same sponsor was established. This structure involved the establishment of a shared governing body and appointment of an executive principal to lead both academies and to work with the head of school.

Significant changes have also been made at middle management level. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and two of the three phase leaders have been recently appointed to the academy. Almost half the teaching staff from the predecessor school have been replaced and a programme of classroom refurbishment, including a major reorganisation of the Early Years Foundation Stage, has been instigated.

The academy is a slightly smaller than average sized primary school. The very large majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the remainder come from a range of backgrounds, although only a few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is well above average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action plus or with statements is above average. Their needs mainly relate to social or emotional difficulties or speech, language and communication needs. Pupil numbers have remained stable.

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

Over a number of years, pupils in the predecessor school attained well below expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics and progress was variable. The outcomes of the national tests for Year 6 in the summer of 2012 reflected this history of underachievement, with attainment and progress well below expected levels. However, since the establishment of the academy, there are positive indications of an improvement in standards of pupils' attainment and, although this is still at an early stage, progress is reasonable. Progress in reading has benefitted from well-planned intervention programmes and a strengthened focus on phonics (linking letters to the sounds that they make). As a result, there has been an impressive improvement in pupils' attitudes towards reading and their progress and attainment. In writing, progress has been more variable, although in Year 6 there is evidence of a rapid improvement in attainment. Pupils' achievement in mathematics remains weak across the school.

The academy's progress tracking systems are clear and robust. They identify challenging targets that, if met, suggest that attainment in most year groups, and especially in Year 6, will come close to meeting age-related expectations. Inspection evidence confirms that a very positive start has been made towards achieving these targets, although in Years 2 and 3, the gap between current and expected attainment remains too wide.

A strong focus has been placed on supporting pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs and those for whom the pupil premium provides appropriate support. Consequently, pupils are making more rapid improvement in reading and writing, although progress remains slow in mathematics.

### **The quality of teaching**

Improvements in pupils' achievement are reflected in improvements in the quality of teaching, especially in Early Years and Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2. In these year groups particularly, the gaps in pupils' attainment are narrowing. However, residual weaknesses in teaching, especially in Years 2 and 3, have yet to be resolved. Very effective assessment systems have been established and this is helping pupils to accurately assess their own and others' work, although the impact of this on pupils' learning is more marked where teaching is stronger. In the most effective lessons, teaching is well matched to pupils' needs and their previous learning. In such lessons, the pace of learning is good because they are well structured and pupils demonstrate an interest in, and enthusiasm for, their learning. A broader and more relevant curriculum is helping to ensure that teaching effectively supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents and pupils say that they feel that the quality of teaching has improved considerably since the academy was opened, and pupils say that they enjoy lessons.

However, although reasonable progress has been made in addressing longstanding weaknesses in teaching, in some classes teachers have lower expectations and so plan work which is not well matched to pupils' needs and the pace of their learning is too slow. Teaching is stronger in English than in mathematics because a newly developed calculation policy is not yet embedded and there are inconsistencies in approaches to how basic numeracy skills are taught. The academy is fully aware of the need to address this and has plans in place to do so.

A well-conceived marking policy has been introduced, and teachers' written comments are helpful, especially in identifying pupils' next steps to their learning. However, the academy recognises that this needs to be further developed to ensure that the excellent practice in some classes is more securely embedded across the school.

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

Resolving very serious weaknesses in pupils' behaviour and safety has rightly been the top priority of the academy's leadership, and in this they have been successful.

Very effective behaviour systems and policies were introduced early on and these are now securely embedded and rigorously applied. The academy has taken firm action to minimise incidents of extreme behaviour and, as a result, the number of exclusions and serious incidents have reduced considerably. Pupils say that they feel safe and happy in the academy; they display positive attitudes towards their learning, and this is reflected in the improvement in attendance, which was well below average but is now close to the national average. Although behaviour in the playground tends to be boisterous, it is well controlled. In the classroom, behaviour is generally good, even where teaching is weaker. Parents say that they feel behaviour has improved and are confident that this will be maintained.

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

The main reason for the recent and rapid improvement that the academy has made in addressing past weaknesses and improving standards is the effectiveness of the leadership, and in particular the executive principal and head of school. Together they have focused on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour and there is secure evidence that their strategies are having a positive impact, for example in the improvements in pupils' reading and behaviour. They have been ably assisted by phase leaders and the SENCO. Rigorous monitoring is accurately informing performance management targets for staff, and intensive support and professional development are helping to ensure that staff have the skills to meet such targets.

Strategic planning is a strength because it is informed by robust analysis of data and monitoring evidence. Suitable priorities are identified, with clear targets and measureable success criteria. Accordingly, the academy has a good capacity to build on recent strengths and rapidly improve further. The curriculum has been suitably developed to ensure more breadth and a stronger focus on the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills. All safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

Although only recently constituted, the Governing Body has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities. It recognises that more needs to be done to engage parents in the process of governance, as no parent or carer has been found who is willing to join the Governing Body.

### **External support**

The academy has made good use of a range of external support, partnerships and training to help in its drive to improve the quality of education and improve standards of pupils' attainment. For example, training in teaching phonics and literacy skills is starting to have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in English. E-ACT has provided very helpful support to leaders through rigorous monitoring visits and clear reports which have given an accurate external view on the impact of training on outcomes for pupils.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that recent improvements in pupils' achievement in reading and writing are secure and that weaknesses in calculation are resolved so that standards in mathematics improve rapidly.
- Eliminate residual weaknesses in teaching by ensuring that:
  - all teachers have suitably high expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - the consistent use of assessment ensures that work is suitably matched to the needs and abilities of all pupils
  - the pace of learning in lessons is resulting in all pupils making the progress of which they are capable.
- Ensure that parents and carers are fully represented on the Governing Body.

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 published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

**Chris Nye**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**