

Serco Inspections  
Colmore Plaza  
20 Colmore Circus Queensway  
Birmingham  
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 0121 679 9161  
Direct email: ann.morris@serco.com



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David Evans  
Staffordshire University Academy  
Marston Road  
Hednesford  
Cannock  
WS12 4JH

Dear Mr Evans

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Staffordshire University Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 3 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

#### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two governors who also represented the sponsor and the head of science to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy action plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed including the new curriculum plan, feedback to teachers following lesson observations and book reviews, and minutes of the governing body's progress committee. You joined me on brief visits to some lessons.

#### **Context**

Since the last inspection two new Vice-Principals have joined the senior leadership team. New heads of science and history have also begun work. The academy has appointed a new SENCo and teachers of English, science and mathematics to begin work in September. The academy is due to move into a new building at the end of October.

## **Main findings**

Leadership capacity has been strengthened by recent appointments at senior and middle leadership level; this has given new drive and energy to deliver the Ofsted action plan targets. New systems and processes have been put in place to monitor the quality of teaching, the quality of work in students' books and the progress of students.

The weaknesses that were identified in the Key Stage 4 curriculum have been addressed. The option process was re-run and students were given the opportunity to study Spanish and take all three science subjects. Although only a small group of students chose to study Spanish, the academy are supporting that group and working to increase numbers in future years. The academy has also changed its strategy for entering students early for English and mathematics. Students will no longer be entered early for English. Students in mathematics will still sit the examination at the end of Year 10 but they will continue to study mathematics in Year 11 to try and improve their grade.

All teachers have received training on strategies to improve questioning and encourage group work. They then had an opportunity to share their best practice and demonstrate the impact of the training by identifying their 'star' lessons for observation by other teachers and senior leaders. Arrangements to support wider aspects of teaching and learning through the deployment of a team of staff coaches are planned for September. A new academy-wide marking policy has been agreed with staff and is due to be implemented from September, adopting a more consistent approach to correcting students' work and giving them advice on how to improve.

There is an increased range of courses available to sixth form students, particularly targeted at students who would benefit from a more vocational curriculum. At the end of this year more students intend to stay on in the sixth form between Year 12 to Year 13 as a result of better advice and guidance. From next year the academy will no longer be working collaboratively with other local schools in delivering the sixth form curriculum; senior leaders believe this will allow them to better ensure high quality provision without reducing the pathways available to students.

The post-Ofsted action plan is very thorough. Targets are broken down into small measurable steps with success criteria that enable governors to identify when the target has been completed. However, this plan only runs for the summer term and longer term plans are less well-defined.

Governors continue to monitor the academy closely. They insist on accessible data which they use well to ask probing questions and identify concerns. Governors are committed to keeping the pace of improvement high and have organised their committees to ensure that this is the case.

Senior leaders and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- ensure actions currently taken to improve teaching and learning, and those planned for 2013-14, are robustly monitored and any underperformance leads to rapid intervention
- develop systems to ensure governors are given precise information about the impact of teaching and learning improvement activities on overall teaching quality and on student outcomes
- carefully monitor the implementation of new marking policy to ensure inconsistencies are addressed quickly
- ensure the 2013-14 development plan follows on from the Ofsted action plan and continues to provide detailed actions for improvement and key milestones that governors can track
- identify the steps that will be taken to raise the achievement of boys.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The academy makes good use of external support. Staffordshire University provides expertise and challenge through sponsor governors and runs a number of initiatives to raise the aspirations of students. The academy also makes use of local authority expertise, particularly around inclusion and SEN.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Deborah James  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**