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Mr R Baylis  
Principal  
Grace Academy Solihull  
Chapelhouse Lane  
Chelmsley Wood  
Birmingham  
B37 5JS

Dear Mr Baylis

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Grace Academy Solihull**

Following my visit to your academy on 4 March 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in September 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Department for Education's Academies Advisers Unit, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Solihull.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2013**

- Improve teaching and students' achievement, particularly in mathematics, in the main school and the sixth form by making sure that:
  - teachers of mathematics are fully aware of any gaps in skills and knowledge that students may have, particularly in Year 11, and use this information fully to plan lessons and activities
  - work in all lessons is accurately matched to the skills and abilities of individual students and is adapted if students are finding the work too easy or too difficult, particularly for disabled students and those who have special educational needs
  - learning activities proceed at a good pace, so students remain well focused and learn quickly
  - teachers adapt the questions they ask to suit students' different levels of understanding and ability.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - planning the procedures for raising teaching quality more precisely and strategically, so that targets in the academy's improvement plan are always clear and measurable
  - ensuring that leaders and governors rigorously and frequently evaluate and monitor progress against these targets and take steps should progress be insufficient, so that teaching improves quickly and is always at least good
  - providing tailored support for staff to ensure that teaching in mathematics improves rapidly
  - ensuring that more sixth-form students continue their studies and do not leave early.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that governors:
  - ensure good value for money in the spending of the Year 7 catch-up funding and the impact it has on the achievement of eligible students
  - develop a full understanding of the use and impact of pupil premium funding
  - are more frequently involved in monitoring the quality of learning and achievement and challenge senior and subject leaders to secure improvements quickly, particularly in mathematics.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 March 2014**

### **Evidence**

I met with you, your senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the academy's sponsor, who is also the education adviser. I visited Year 11 and Year 9 mathematics lessons, looked at students' work and spoke to students about their learning and progress. These observations of learning were conducted jointly with a senior leader. I reviewed a range of school documentation, including information about students' achievement, behaviour and attendance. The single central record was scrutinised as new staff have joined the academy since the first monitoring inspection visit in November 2013. This monitoring inspection focused in particular on the work the academy has done to address the areas for improvement relating to mathematics.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection visit, five teachers have joined and two teachers have left. The academy has faced challenges in recruiting good quality teaching staff. These issues are now being resolved and vacant posts have been filled.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

You, your senior leaders and the governors have taken effective action to ensure that the areas identified as weaknesses at the previous section 5 inspection are being addressed quickly. However, the external review of governance has not yet been completed. The members of the governing body have a range of skills but have rightly identified their own further training and development as a priority. The leadership team has been restructured and leaders now have a much clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Line management structures have also improved. This has led to greater accountability and a more rigorous approach to monitoring and reviewing students' progress. The heads of school have responsibility for tracking students' academic progress and personal and social development. This combination has ensured that any barriers to progress are quickly identified and appropriate support is speedily provided.

Leaders are committed to improving the students' education, and have a shared and consistent view about what needs to be done to achieve this. Information provided by the academy shows that the quality of teaching is improving in most subjects. However, some of the teaching in mathematics still requires improvement and the quality of students' work in this subject is variable.

The curriculum at all key stages has been modified to better suit the needs of individual students. As a result, more sixth form students are staying on their chosen courses.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- There is a continued emphasis on improving the quality of teaching. Bespoke training is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching in most subjects. Students said that lessons are now more interesting, especially when teachers plan practical or varied approaches to learning.
- Teaching has improved and the judgements on the quality of teaching made by the academy leaders are accurate as they have rightly identified that some teaching in mathematics requires improvement. Students say that teaching has improved over the last six months.
- In general, teachers now show higher expectations. Lessons are more challenging and as a result the progress made by students in their learning is improving quickly.
- There is a thorough approach to action planning and the analysis of information on students' achievement at all levels. Teachers have good quality information on the prior attainment of students in their groups, and students' progress is monitored and reviewed regularly in all subjects. There are clear lines of accountability and senior leaders regularly review the work of departments with subject leaders.
- Information provided by the academy indicates that the behaviour of students is improving. There are fewer fixed-term exclusions and there have been no permanent exclusions this year. Students' attendance is improving and is broadly in line with national figures.
- Governors are now more frequently involved in monitoring the quality of learning and achievement. Governors are able to identify the academy's strengths and the areas that need to be improved to raise students' achievement.
- The governing body continues to ensure that the all staff have been checked as required, and are trained appropriately to keep students safe and free from harm.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Teachers of mathematics are now more aware of the gaps in students' skills and knowledge. However, in some groups, students do not get enough opportunities to develop and improve their knowledge and understanding, including the skills of using and applying mathematical concepts.
- The work in mathematics is not always matched to the skills, abilities and progress of individual students.

- The quality of marking in mathematics is variable, and it does not always help students to better understand their mistakes or to make progress.
- The previous policy of entering students early for GCSE examinations has negatively affected the attainment and progress of students in Year 11, particularly in humanities. The academy now no longer enters students early for GCSE examinations. The projected results for Year 10 students are much more positive.
- Leaders have not ensured that the gap in attainment in mathematics between students who are eligible for free school meals and other students is closing quickly. Information provided by the academy indicates that students in Year 11 who are eligible for free school meals are achieving three quarters of a grade lower in mathematics than other students.

### **External support**

The academy makes effective use of external support. The Principal arranges support from the wider academy chain and beyond. The academy sponsor has recently appointed an education adviser who is reviewing the impact of the recent restructuring of academy staffing and leadership. Support from the sponsor's other advisers has been well focused and proportionate. Other external consultants are being used effectively, for example to develop the quality of teaching. The sponsor has provided extra funding to help attract good quality teachers. Leaders and the governing body will need to evaluate the impact of the support received to ensure that it is all of an equally high standard.