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Mr Martin Murphy
Interim Executive Principal
Park Hall Academy
Water Orton Road
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Birmingham
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Dear Mr Murphy

Special measures monitoring inspection of Park Hall Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 28 November 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection I met with you, the interim principal and the academy's improvement partner. A meeting was also held with a small group of governors made up from the Chair of the Governing Body, the sponsor Chair of the rapid recovery plan committee and one other governor. The sponsor's rapid recovery plan and the academy's action plan were evaluated.

Context

There have been significant changes to leadership and teaching staff since the inspection, of which the most notable has been the departure of the previous headteacher and the subsequent appointment of an interim executive principal and an interim principal who work across the academy trust. In addition there have been

large-scale changes in the responsibilities of other senior leaders, leading to a largely restructured senior leadership team. There are a further eleven teachers who have made arrangements to leave the academy. Successful recruiting by senior leaders means that some new teachers will start in April. Academy leaders are currently recruiting to other posts and these teachers will start in September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The academy sponsor has acted swiftly to improve leadership in the academy through creating a new interim leadership structure using experienced and successful senior leaders from the partner school. Under this arrangement, senior leaders have responded to the areas for improvement from the inspection and are determined to improve the academy. Senior leaders expressed their concern that they are not as far ahead as they would have liked to have been by this stage due to the substantial amount of changes that have been necessary to staff roles and in introducing new systems. Nevertheless, their work is starting to have an impact. Senior leaders, governors and the academy's improvement partner all talked enthusiastically about the improvements to the behaviour of students around the academy and in lessons, and improvements to the quality of teaching evidenced through better marking seen in work scrutiny.

Academy leaders have concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and making sure that all teachers have the necessary skills to teach consistently good or better lessons. Teachers have recently had training on effective lesson planning, using questioning to encourage deeper thinking, marking to make sure that all students know how to improve the quality of their work, and behaviour management. Further training is planned in other aspects, such as planning activities which engage all students in their learning. This training has been delivered through morning professional development time, prior to the start of school, which takes place one day each week. External consultants and internal volunteers are keen to share their practice with others in these sessions. Senior leaders have also made sure that students know what to expect in their lessons and have delivered 'learning to learn' assemblies to students. For example, in teaching them how they should respond to marking from the teacher.

There is greater rigour to the way in which the work of subject leaders is being monitored. Senior leaders have recently carried out a detailed and thorough work scrutiny in which every student's books for every subject have been reviewed. Feedback, in terms of strengths and weaknesses of marking, has been given to teachers as they gradually improve their skills. Lesson observations are becoming more frequent, and this will support senior leaders in checking on improvements to the quality of teaching. The accuracy of some teachers' assessments is a concern for

senior leaders, who are not always able to use this information reliably to identify where students are underachieving and to intervene to accelerate progress. Subject leaders should therefore take immediate action to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Senior leaders are currently doing much of the subject leaders' work on monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching in subject areas. This model is not sustainable in the long term, and senior leaders need to make sure that subject leaders have the necessary skills to be able to carry out accurate checks on the work of teachers in their area. This will free-up time for senior leaders to work on holding subject leaders to account.

The recommended external review of governance has not yet taken place. There has been a restructuring of governance following the inspection and the formation of the rapid recovery committee, whose purpose is to monitor the academy's work on progress made towards coming out of special measures. A further refinement of governors' roles is planned as the academy moves to a more formalised arrangement as a local governing board, reporting to the multi-academy trust board.

The sponsor's rapid recovery plan is detailed and indicates clear lines of accountability for monitoring and evaluating the progress made with actions. The academy improvement plan states clearly the work to be done but needs to be more closely aligned with the sponsor's rapid recovery plan. It also lacks clarity on the impact of actions on improving achievement, such as the progress in English and mathematics made by students supported by the pupil premium grant.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's rapid recovery plan is fit for purpose.

The academy's action plan is not fit for purpose.

I recommend that the academy does not appoint newly qualified teachers. However, newly qualified teachers from the partner school may teach some of their time within the academy.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Solihull. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector