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Mr Patrick Ottley-O'Connor
Principal
West Walsall E-ACT Academy
Primley Avenue
Walsall
WS2 9UA

Dear Mr Ottley-O'Connor

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Walsall E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 7 May, 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim Principal, the Principal designate, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the sponsor. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, the Principal has left the academy and an interim Principal is leading the academy until a new Principal takes up her position in September. A new Vice-Principal has also been appointed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The sponsor's statement of action and the academy improvement plan provide a detailed set of actions to be taken that cover all the priorities identified in the inspection report. Both documents use the same format and each priority is broken down into small steps with measurable success criteria that make it easy for the sponsor and governors to track and monitor the impact of improvement activities.

The interim Principal has made an urgent start on implementing the actions identified following the inspection. There have been changes in leadership roles and additional leadership capacity has been brought into the academy. The interim Principal has focused on the implementation of a number of short, sharp measures that have had an immediate impact on the academy and been effective in developing a common vision for academy improvement among staff and students. These include:

- improvement in student behaviour through the consistent application of rules on standards of uniform, a ban on the use of mobile phones during lessons and a reduction in lateness to lessons
- introduction of the West Walsall Way as an agreed set of minimum standards for lessons
- a thorough review of teaching and the introduction of teacher support plans where teaching requires improvement
- increased opportunities for staff to participate in programmes to improve the quality of their teaching and leadership
- improved information tracking systems that give middle leaders a valuable insight into students' progress enabling them to make better decisions about which students need additional intervention
- the introduction of more appropriate Key Stage 4 subjects for Year 9 students currently undertaking options choices.

Longer-term priorities, including a full review of the range of subjects on offer, further improvements to the quality of teaching and improving marking have begun. However, there is little information in the statement of action and the academy improvement plan on what specific actions will be taken next year around these aspects. This needs to be addressed by the sponsor, the governing body and the substantive Principal as a matter of urgency to ensure actions are distributed evenly through next year and all priorities are addressed.

Governors fully accept the issues identified in the report and are working closely with the interim Principal to improve their monitoring of the performance of the academy. A governor data dashboard has been developed to allow governors to track the

progress against key indicators and an annual governance timetable has been drawn up to ensure regular monitoring of key areas. An external review of governance, including pupil premium spending, is planned for later this term.

The E-ACT education adviser has taken rapid action to secure additional support for the academy, arranging the appointment of the interim Principal and building a wider network of support from a local academy and regional education experts. She provides challenge to the Principal through regular meetings and has taken a role in the academy improvement work by participating in the review of teaching for example. She is a member of the raising achievement board (RAB) that meets every five weeks to evaluate the progress made by the academy.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Her Majesty's Inspector