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20 May 2014

Mr Andrew Taylor-Edwards  
Headteacher  
The Winsford E-ACT Academy  
Grange Lane  
Winsford  
Cheshire  
CW7 2BT

Dear Mr Taylor-Edwards

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Winsford E-ACT Academy, Cheshire West and Chester**

Following my visit to your academy on 19 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors 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 that the academy building becomes a celebration of and stimulus for learning through the effective display of students' work to inspire, to model good practice and to give visual evidence of the academy's core values.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, a group of Year 10 students and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I had a telephone discussion with a representative of the sponsor. I evaluated the academy's improvement plan and read documents relating to potential future sponsorship. I also considered senior leaders' analysis of progress being made

by groups of students currently attending the academy. You accompanied me on a tour of the academy during which we made brief visits to a range of lessons.

## **Context**

The academy's sponsor is currently E-ACT, whose Board of Trustees agreed on 26 February 2014 that Winsford Academy will no longer be part of the sponsor's group of schools. The decision to change sponsor has been agreed with the Department for Education. Progress with the transfer to a new sponsor is at an advanced stage.

A new Chair of Governors with extensive experience in secondary education, combined with a longstanding connection with the academy and its predecessor schools, was appointed in April 2014.

There have been no changes of academy leaders or teaching staff since the inspection that took place in January 2014. Around ten teaching staff and eight support staff are due to leave the academy at the end of the summer term due to retirement, securing new posts elsewhere or as a result of redundancy following a staffing restructure. Three new staff will join the academy in September 2014 to enhance the academy's capacity to raise achievement in English and mathematics. The number of students on roll remains stable.

## **Main findings**

The academy's leaders have taken urgent action to address the findings of the recent section 5 inspection. They have undertaken a full review of the academy's work, assessed the impact of their strategies to raise achievement and strengthened plans to improve performance. Leaders' self-evaluation concurred with the areas for improvement that were reported by inspectors in January 2014. The strategies that they had begun to develop to raise achievement prior to the last inspection have been refined and are becoming embedded.

Leaders, teachers and support staff are working hard to ensure that more students make good progress. An extensive revision programme was very well-attended by Year 11 students during the Easter break. Interventions to support individuals and groups are being complemented by a focus across the academy on developing teaching to a consistently good or better quality. The quality of teaching is improving, as demonstrated by evidence from lesson observations undertaken by leaders, scrutiny of students' work and feedback from students. A system has been developed whereby teachers offer each other support through colleagues observing and critically reflecting upon each other's practice. This and other bespoke professional development programmes are raising the bar in terms of expectations. The quality of teachers' marking is becoming more consistent with substantial evidence of students receiving feedback on the strengths of their work and advice on improvement. The potential for students' learning to be strengthened through the display and celebration of their work is undeveloped. Leaders recognise that they

have a blank canvas on which to make a powerful statement about the academy's vision, values and achievements.

The academy's systems for tracking students' achievements have been strengthened and reflect a clear expectation that they make accelerated progress, throughout each key stage. The results of teachers' assessments of students' work, along with test scores, are regularly collected and analysed. Data suggest that GCSE performance is set to rise in 2014; provisional indications are that progress and attainment in English and mathematics will be much closer to national figures than they have been previously in the academy. The gap in achievement between the performance of students eligible for pupil premium and their peers is closing as a result of more forensic analysis of their achievement and of what works well in the academy's repertoire of intervention programmes.

Attendance is similar to the national figure and the proportion of students who are persistently absent continues to reduce. Behaviour is improving due to improved attitudes to learning, increasingly consistent expectations in classrooms and social spaces and the impact of staff including the academy-based police officer.

Students are increasingly consulted on the academy's work, including in relation to bullying. Students spoke enthusiastically to me about their work as 'heroes' modelling caring behaviour; they feel comfortable, following an awareness-raising programme, to disclose when they feel vulnerable and to take positive action to avoid others feeling unsafe or isolated. Students are also now consulted on the academy's policies, including a new anti-bullying policy. The academy's revised staffing structure includes new posts that emphasise the importance behaviour and safety.

The attendance and achievement of students in the sixth form is being monitored closely as the same rigour that characterises leadership in the main academy is now being applied within the sixth form. Students have been encouraged to identify, and work with staff support, on any gaps in their understanding. Sixth form attendance has improved.

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

### **External support**

The academy's performance has been monitored on a termly basis by an education adviser from the sponsor. He has produced a 'score card' based on a review of data and discussion with you, which identifies strengths and areas for improvement in the academy's provision and standards achieved. You have also valued the support provided by personnel at E-ACT for managing the restructure of staffing.

Two effective professional development programmes for teachers have been continued; these were initially brokered by the sponsor and are now at a stage of implementation that is managed entirely by academy leaders. They are proving effective in raising the quality of individual teachers' work. A project manager is charged with ensuring a smooth transition in sponsorship arrangements.

Informal links have been maintained by some staff with other schools and services in Cheshire West and Cheshire local authority. You also value your involvement with a local teaching school that has been beneficial in staff recruitment and professional development.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester, the Education Funding Agency, the sponsor and the DfE Academies Unit.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

**Her Majesty's Inspector**