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13 June 2014

Mr R Baylis
Principal
Grace Academy Solihull
Chapelhouse Lane
Chelmsley Wood
Birmingham
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Dear Mr Baylis

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Grace Academy Solihull

Following my visit to your academy on 12 June 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy 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 third monitoring inspection on 12 June 2014

Evidence

I met with you, your senior leaders, the head of mathematics and representatives of the academy's sponsor and governing body. I visited five Year 9 mathematics lessons and six Year 9 English lessons. During these visits I looked at the work in students' books and spoke to them about their learning. The observations of learning in mathematics were conducted jointly with the sponsor's Chief Executive Officer For Education. I separately reviewed a number of students' books and a range of academy documentation, including information about students' achievement, behaviour and attendance. The external review of governance carried out by Walsall Children's Services was evaluated. The single central record was scrutinised as new staff have joined the academy since the second monitoring inspection visit in March 2014. This monitoring inspection focused in particular on the work the academy has done to address the areas for improvement relating to the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection visit, one teacher has joined and two teachers have left the academy. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned and will step down in September 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Since the last monitoring inspection visit you and your senior and middle leaders have taken swift and successful action to resolve the issues identified as areas for improvement.

The external review of governance has now been completed and governors have begun to take effective action on the recommended areas for improvement. However, they have not yet planned how they intend to contribute to raising standards at the academy in the future. Governors monitor the impact academy leaders have on speeding up the progress students make and appropriately challenge leaders when the quality of teaching or students' progress is unacceptable. Information provided by the academy shows that the number of students making expected progress in a range of subjects is increasing. The attainment gap between students who are eligible for free school meals and other students is closing in Years 10, 9, 8 and 7. However, the gap in Year 11 stubbornly remains at three quarters of a grade lower in mathematics and two thirds of a grade lower in English. Governors ensure that the requirements to keep students safe from harm are met.

Information provided by the academy shows that the quality of teaching has improved since the previous monitoring inspection visit in March, and is meeting students' needs more effectively. Feedback through marking enables students to

improve their work. However, students' mistakes or misconceptions are not always picked up and corrected in lessons. Teachers expect students to present their work neatly and accurately. As a result, the work in students' books reflects positive attitudes to learning. In mathematics, leaders have introduced 'The book agreement' and 'Tracking my progress' sheets which make clear what is expected of students in how they present and complete their work, the level at which they should be working and their current attainment. Students say that these sheets have helped them to improve their work and better understand what it is they need to do to improve. However, where staffing issues have disrupted the continuity of students' learning the quality of work and progress is still below that expected.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers are providing appropriate learning opportunities to meet the needs of different ability groups. However, students' progress is hindered when mathematics groups are regularly taught by cover or supply teachers.
- The quality of teaching across the academy continues to improve as a result of training for teachers and appropriate focused strategies to ensure students make the progress expected of them. Students say they receive feedback through marking that helps them improve their work.
- Leaders frequently and accurately monitor and evaluate the work of the academy. This enables leaders at all levels to plan appropriate actions to improve students' progress.
- Leaders ensure that the academy culture promotes higher standards of behaviour. Students say that instances of poor behavior have reduced since the last monitoring inspection visit in March.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- The strategies to improve students' attendance have not resulted in improvements. Students' attendance is below the national average. The percentage of students who are persistently absent is higher than the national average.
- Leaders have not made plans to ensure students who have temporary teachers have appropriate work, or that their work is checked and feedback provided. Students who have temporary teachers for the majority of lessons in mathematics do not make the progress expected of them.
- The average reading age of Year 10 students who are supported by the pupil premium grant is 10 months lower than that of other students. Leaders have not yet identified how this gap can be closed.

External support

The academy makes effective use of external support to improve the quality of teaching, leadership and management and to speed up students' progress. This has been achieved through links with outstanding schools, a local Teaching School Alliance and Birmingham City University.