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10 July 2014

Martin Murphy  
Interim Executive Principal  
Park Hall Academy  
Water Orton Road  
Castle Bromwich  
Birmingham  
B36 9HF

Dear Mr Murphy

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Park Hall Academy**

Following my visit with Elizabeth Talmadge and Steven Goldsmith, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 8–9 July 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 special measures.  
The academy statement of action is fit for purpose.  
I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Improve teaching so that a higher proportion is consistently good or better by all teachers:
  - using accurate assessment information to plan interesting work for students so the level of challenge is matched to their ability and enables all students to make good progress
  - making lessons more interactive and enjoyable so students develop their skills in working independently or in groups
  - giving students clearer feedback during lessons and in marking so they know how to improve their work
  - developing their use of probing questions to stimulate students' greater involvement in discussions and to deepen their understanding.
  
- Improve behaviour in lessons and around the school by:
  - staff having higher expectations of how students conduct themselves and ensuring that low-level disruption in lessons is eradicated
  - students improving their punctuality to lessons and developing more positive attitudes to learning.
  
- Develop the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - a simple, accurate system, understood by all staff and governors, is used to check on students' progress and identify where extra help is needed to support students making slow progress
  - monitoring and evaluation by senior and subject leaders is more rigorous so that all policies are implemented consistently throughout the academy
  - judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate and take account of the amount of progress students make
  - teachers are given clear next steps for improvement after leaders observe lessons, and that these are followed up to make sure that they have made a difference
  - the governing body checks that there are clear actions in the school development plan that will improve teaching and students' achievement, and that these are monitored regularly so that academy leaders are held to account.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8–9 July 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Interim Executive Principal, Interim Principal and other members of the senior leadership team, two governors, the academy's improvement partner and two external consultants who have been providing support for the academy. Due to the timing of the inspection, it was not possible to observe any teaching and learning in Year 11 or Year 13. No lessons for Year 10 were seen due to students being on work experience during the week of the inspection. Twenty-nine lessons were observed, involving 28 teachers, including four which were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke with students during lessons and at break and lunchtime. Inspectors also met formally with groups of students from Years 9 and 10.

### **Context**

Since the first monitoring inspection in March, there have been several changes to staffing. A number of teachers have left the academy, including the subject leader for science. The senior leadership team have undergone a further restructuring of their roles and there is currently a consultation process taking place regarding the new structure for September.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The academy's strategies to improve the outcomes for students are not, as yet, making a noticeable difference to the achievement of students. Outcomes for students in Year 11 are indicated to remain broadly similar to those of 2013, and therefore attainment is likely to remain well below national averages. Slow progress is indicated to have been made by students in English and mathematics, and data provided by academy leaders predicts that the proportion of students making expected progress in these subjects will continue to be well below national figures.

Students who are supported by the pupil premium continue to make much less progress and to attain lower standards than others in English and mathematics. There are early indications of an improving trend in attainment and progress for eligible students, but the attainment and progress of other students is improving at a faster rate, with no sign of this gap narrowing.

Achievement in the sixth form is predicted to improve, with more students achieving the higher grades at AS level in a range of subjects.

At Key Stage 3, there is a very mixed picture. Students in Year 9 are indicated to be making progress which is very similar to that of students nationally. However, about half of the students in Year 8 are not making the progress that is expected of them.

This is the outcome of decisions by previous academy leaders to allocate the best teachers to Key Stage 4, leaving much of the teaching in Key Stage 3 as inadequate. Since they started in the academy, many students in Year 8 have been taught by a series of different temporary or supply teachers. Senior leaders must take urgent action to ensure that these students are taught by teachers whose practice is consistently at least good to enable them to catch up.

Achievement seen in lessons and in students' books varied. In English, history, French and performing arts, students make steady progress as a result of detailed marking, and feedback in lessons, which is starting to have an impact on accelerating progress further. In other subjects, far too little progress was made as a result of work which was often badly explained, too easy or did not interest students. This was particularly evident in science, where progress is inadequate.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching is improving but not yet at a fast enough pace. There are still too many lessons where teachers do not have high enough expectations. This leads to work and activities being planned which either fail to interest, or are not sufficiently challenging, for all students. Teachers are in a better position to use assessment information to inform their planning of work for students, due to information that is now made available to them. Not all teachers do this well and inconsistencies were seen across the academy.

The greatest concern is the lack of confidence in the accuracy of teachers' assessments, especially at Key Stage 3, and this does not help either teachers or academy leaders in using data to identify students who require support to improve their learning. Senior leaders should take urgent action to address this through external validation and regular internal moderation.

The interim principal's work to improve behaviour has made an enormous difference to the academy. Teachers told inspectors that they are now able to concentrate on improving their own practice and developing their skills in the classroom rather than their time being taken up with behaviour management. There is now a culture of teachers welcoming support to improve their teaching. In feeding back to teachers after lesson observations, inspectors noted the accuracy of teachers' own reflections on their practice and a willingness to accept advice. This was particularly strong among newly and recently qualified teachers.

There are early signs of strengths in teaching seen in most subjects. For example, in English, teachers' questions encouraged deeper thinking and tested students' understanding well. In mathematics, students worked enthusiastically in groups to tackle a series of progressively more difficult challenges. Highly positive attitudes to learning are seen where teachers have high expectations and good subject

knowledge which they use to plan activities which build on what students already know.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The most noticeable difference in the academy has been in behaviour. Teachers, students and external consultants working with the school talked enthusiastically about how behaviour has improved. This has empowered teachers to teach more effectively and is starting to have an impact on learning in classes. There has been a culture change amongst all members of the school community and a growing belief that students can achieve better outcomes.

Around the academy, inspectors noted a calm and orderly atmosphere. Students told inspectors how uniform had improved and also that fewer of their lessons were disrupted due to bad behaviour. At social times, students are well supervised and there is a team spirit, with all staff seeing it as their responsibility to work together to make behaviour better.

The number of incidents of poor behaviour has significantly reduced. A group of students from Year 10 who met with an inspector were very appreciative of the support the academy has provided for them in improving their behaviour. They recognise how unacceptable their behaviour was before Christmas and talked about the difference that has been made to their behaviour. They now want other students to recognise that their behaviours also need to change.

Attendance strategies have been effective and attendance continues to improve which is indicated to be similar to the national average.

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

There have been numerous changes to staffing and restructuring of roles as the Interim Principal has worked to drive improvements to teaching. The interim executive principal and governors have been quick to address concerns in the quality of teaching, or concerns about leadership. This resulted in a significant change of staff, including some teachers taking the decision to leave. As a result, there will be around 30 new teachers starting in the academy in September, representing a change of almost a third of the teaching staff. Virtually all of these posts are permanent positions, which will bring a much-needed period of stability to the academy. Senior leaders will need to introduce a programme of support and induction for these new staff to ensure that they quickly become part of the team.

Teaching is improving where teachers are engaging with the support provided to help them to improve their skills. Teachers meet together each week to share their practice and to focus on different aspects of teaching that need to improve or become more consistent across the academy. Subject leaders meet together to

share their leadership practice and to discuss aspects of improving monitoring in their areas of responsibility. These strategies are starting to have an impact on improving teaching and leadership across the academy.

Leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate and use information on progress from students' books, and also assessment information, to inform the judgements made. External consultants have worked with leaders in ensuring that these judgements are accurate and that feedback is used to make a difference to improvements in teaching. Where lessons were observed jointly with inspectors, senior leaders were accurate in their identification of strengths and the key actions necessary to improve learning.

Analyses provided to governors on the use of pupil premium funding do not enable them to identify if gaps are closing. There are a number of strategies in place to support eligible students but these are not evaluated sufficiently in terms of the impact on attainment and progress.

There is no whole-academy strategy to improving literacy levels. Academy leaders have plans to develop the literacy skills of weak readers in Years 7 and 8. Students who will be starting in the academy in September have already taken a test to ascertain their literacy levels. This means that support can start far quicker than has happened in the past. As yet, there is no strategy to identify and support weak readers in other year groups. Academy leaders need to address this urgently to identify strategies to help accelerate reading for all students where this is identified as a concern.

The governors' Rapid Recovery Plan committee has a sharp focus on monitoring the key actions necessary to improve the academy. The academy improvement plan has been rewritten to more closely align with the governors' Rapid Recovery Plan, allowing leaders at all levels to better understand their role in the academy improvement process. Governors are now in a stronger position to hold leaders to account for their areas of responsibility.

### **External support**

Support from external consultants who have been working with the school is effective. Partnerships established through the sponsor are having an impact on improving subject leadership. The quality of subject leadership is expected to be strengthened further in September when a number of leaders from the sponsor academy start to work with this academy. Evaluations and reports written by external consultants are challenging and identify accurately the areas that are not yet good enough.