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10 July 2014

Marie Nightingale  
Interim Principal  
The Nuneaton Academy  
Radnor Drive  
Nuneaton  
CV10 7PD

Dear Mrs Nightingale

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Nuneaton Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 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 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 in March 2014.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, representatives of the sponsor, teachers, subject leaders, support staff and students. A number of short visits were made to lessons, and absence records for the day were checked. The sponsor and the school have produced a joint statement of action and improvement plan, which was evaluated.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, following a period as Executive Principal (Midlands Academy Trust), you have been appointed as Interim Principal. There have been no other changes to staffing. However, you are currently undertaking a restructure at senior and middle leader level that will enable you to realign roles and responsibilities to meet the priorities of the academy. In addition, the vast majority of mathematics teachers are due to leave the school at the end of the summer term. You have secured replacements for most of these staff, including the subject leader

and their assistant, but you are aware that there will be some non-specialist teaching required.

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

The academy sponsor and the academy have produced a joint statement of action and school improvement plan to which both parties have contributed. The plan itself is fit for purpose. Appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement are in place, and these are prioritised over a suitable time span. The plans show when and where reviews of progress against agreed success criteria will take place. However, there needs to be more clarity about the stages required to monitor, review and evaluate, so that those responsible at each point are identified and the processes by which judgements will be made are clear. Some success criteria are not specific enough and need to have a greater focus on how an action will improve outcomes for students. The progress towards achieving these criteria needs to be supported by specific milestones that are appropriate and measurable. To ensure that planning effectively supports the required improvement, the trust's Raising Attainment Policy should be cross-referenced to the plan for this academy.

The academy has been through a period of turbulence, particularly in relation to its leadership, with three Principals within the last year. You have now been appointed as Interim Principal and are working very hard with the Midland Academy Trust to strengthen leadership through a well-focused restructure of roles and responsibilities. However, the capacity of leaders to deliver on the action plan is limited until this new team has been established and is working at its optimum.

Although you have only been in post for a very short period of time, a number of actions have already been taken which are beginning to have a positive impact. You and your leaders have developed a Teaching and Learning Handbook which ensures that staff at all levels now have the information they need about the academy's expectations, roles and responsibilities, and key policies. You have also ensured that, from September, there will be a detailed academy calendar that shows each assessment point and all quality assurance activities. Consequently, staff are clear about how and when they will be held accountable and they are very appreciative of the much improved communication. One staff member commented that they can now use their own time much more effectively because they know what is coming and when.

One of your priorities has been to raise aspiration and expectations within the academy. To this end, you have quickly introduced baseline testing to ensure that students' starting points are accurately measured. A robust system for tracking students' progress six times a year now enables rapid identification of underperformance. You have introduced challenge meetings for curriculum leaders, following data collection and analysis, and this is now providing the opportunity to implement interventions quickly. Curriculum leaders expressed their appreciation that data analysis is now done centrally so that they can focus more on taking

appropriate action based on the information. This is in its early days and the next step will be to ensure that interventions put in place are then monitored for their impact. In addition, the academy now needs to ensure that assessments are thoroughly moderated, particularly in mathematics and at Key Stage 4, so that leaders can be assured that progress-tracking data is always accurate.

The recent development of a traffic light system to share progress with students for core subjects has had a positive effect. Teachers and students report that they find the system motivating and that it makes them want to do better. One student said, 'Nobody wants to be on a red.' You are aware that the benefits of the system will be boosted by tracking in this way for each of the core subjects separately. You also have plans to raise expectations further by increasing the requirements to achieve amber or green.

Currently, much of the monitoring of teaching and learning is carried out by senior leaders. You recognise that this now needs to develop further so that subject leaders are more involved in holding their staff to account. To this end, senior leaders have begun to ensure that systems and processes are modelled. For instance, a recent work scrutiny was led by the acting Vice Principal with the intention that, at the next session, curriculum leaders would be able to carry out the process themselves.

Teachers are beginning to think more carefully about providing engaging activities for students. For instance, a Year 7 pilot group was thoroughly engrossed in their plans for designing, sourcing and costing a product of their choice and were very clear about the skills they were developing in being able to work more effectively in a group. Staff are now using an agreed lesson planning format which ensures that work is matched overall to appropriate levels for a teaching group. However, as yet, there is little evidence of teachers routinely planning tasks at different levels of difficulty to meet the abilities of smaller groups. This means that, in most lessons visited, all students were completing the same task. Consequently, some tasks were not hard enough for all students.

The academy introduced a new marking policy in April. There is evidence that this is now being applied consistently. Although the quality of comments is not yet consistent, students increasingly have clear advice about what they have done well and what they could do better. Importantly, students say that this is what they expect from marking now. The next step for the academy is to develop students' response to marking so that this becomes part of their routine.

Since the inspection, you and your leaders have worked hard to improve communication with parents. You have introduced a new system for reporting to parents that ensures they have very regular, detailed information about how their child is progressing, the level of effort they are making, their behaviour and attendance, and the rewards they have earned. Improved transition arrangements for Year 6 pupils ensure that all parents new to the school have opportunities to visit

the academy and speak to leaders and teachers. You have also introduced parent 'surgeries' so that all parents can discuss concerns with you directly.

Although a review of governance has yet to be completed, under the new Chair and Vice Chair, governors have been proactive in ensuring that this does not slow their progress. Training has been undertaken, supported by the trust, so that they now have a much clearer understanding of progress and attainment information and of how to interrogate it through the use of challenging questions. As a result, the Chair has a clear and accurate view of the academy's current position, the progress it has made since the last inspection and the areas that are a priority for action.

Governors, teachers, support staff and middle leaders agree that behaviour, whilst improving, remains a key issue to enable more rapid improvement. Senior leaders acknowledge this, but as yet have not been able to focus on developing the planned new behaviour policy. As you are aware, this is a crucial next step. You are planning to ensure that the new policy makes clear the links between behaviour, attendance and achievement. That this happens quickly is essential, particularly due to concerns raised during my visit when the day's absence was checked against the behaviour log, showing a marked correlation between absence and the number of times a student misbehaves.

Since January, when reviews carried out in the academy alerted the trust to some of the issues, there has been focused and targeted support provided. Fortnightly Challenge and Intervention Group meetings include reports from the trust's Successful Futures Partners who are working with the academy, as well as updates on progress from the Principal. The trust has focused most support on senior leadership as that is rightly seen as the key driver for improvement.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school'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.

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

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**