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17 November 2014

Mr Darren Gelder  
Principal  
Grace Academy Solihull  
Chapelhouse Road  
Solihull  
B37

Dear Mr Gelder

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Grace Academy Solihull**

Following my visit to your academy on 10 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the behaviour and safety of students identified in the academy's last section 5 report and published data related to students' behaviour and attendance.

### **Evidence**

I considered a range of evidence including:

- observations of students' behaviour throughout the day
- scrutiny of documentation related to students' behaviour and safety
- discussions with leaders, staff and students

Having considered all of the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the **behaviour and safety of students requires improvement.**

### **Context**

Grace Academy Solihull is the same size as most other secondary schools with a sixth form. The academy is one of three academies which form the Grace Foundation. The large majority of students are White British. A well above average proportion of students are eligible for support from the pupil premium (additional

funding provided by the government, mainly for students known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after in public care). The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average. Students are currently in all age tutor groups.

Since the school's Monitoring Inspection in June 2014, the Principal has left the academy and has been replaced by yourself. The governing body has been dissolved and a new Interim Executive Board has been created. This body is led by a new chair.

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

Students' behaviour requires improvement because their attitudes to learning in lessons are too variable. In addition, attendance remains below average and is not improving quickly enough. Although students were observed to arrive at lessons on time, rather too many arrive late at the start of the school day.

During my visit, students' attitudes to learning varied but were strongly linked to the quality of teaching. Year 9 students spoke optimistically about the very recent improvements in attitudes to learning associated with commencement of GCSE courses. However, they also reported that this was not the case in lessons last term in which learning was quite often disrupted by incidents of off-task behaviour.

Positive attitudes to learning were evident a variety of lessons. In a post 16 mathematics lesson, the teacher motivated students by encouraging them to 'move as quickly as they could on to the more demanding questions'. This was in contrast to a few other lessons where pupils chatted about things completely unrelated to the subject matter because the teaching failed to inject any sense of urgency. I asked some pupils why they engaged in talk that was unrelated to the lesson. They said they did this because they could complete their work easily in the time available and that, usually, it was not very difficult. Levels of concentration are variable because work is not always matched well enough to students' different abilities. In only a few lessons was it clear to students what they needed to do in order to really excel.

In some lessons, opportunities were missed to recognise the achievements of students in lessons. An exception to this was an English lesson where the teacher used carefully targeted questions to highlight student insights into some of the characters in 'Of Mice and Men'. In some lessons, students did not receive enough praise for their efforts and not enough attention was given to ensuring they knew by the end of the lessons what they had learnt. Examples were seen of praise being misdirected; for instance, students were congratulated for their 'good' behaviour when they were being merely passive and many were not purposefully engaged in their work. Too little use is made of the academy's rewards (Grace Points) to motivate pupils. Weaknesses in teaching are preventing students from developing

more positive attitudes to learning. It was reassuring to hear that you have recognised that the most important immediate priority is to improve the quality of teaching.

You are keeping accurate records about behaviour. These records show that students' behaviour is improving and that you have raised expectations in respect of what is acceptable. Your analysis of behaviour records, including punctuality and attendance, is giving you important insights into how well the academy meets the needs of different groups of students. Disabled students and those with special educational needs behave and attend as well as other students.

Staff reported that there is clarity about how behaviour should be managed in the classroom. Most staff expressed satisfaction with the support they receive from senior leaders in managing behaviour. Although it is early days, students reported that particularly since the start of this term, there is much more consistency about how different members of staff manage behaviour. This has been achieved because of the effective training staff have received and the well-judged and timely additional support provided by senior staff. The academy has also improved the way it manages the behaviour of pupils at risk of exclusion. When I visited the school, no students were in the school's 'Mandela Centre' but this provision appears to have helped reduce exclusions and is appreciated by the small minority of students that find it difficult to cope in normal lessons. Considerable care is taken to ensure students experiencing this provision are supported well during their moves back into normal lessons

At break and lunch times students behaved well. Students suggested that this was normally the case and reflected the pride they have in attending the academy. Younger students indicated that they feel safe in the academy, even though there is no area that is reserved purely for their use. They said that older students, often from their tutor group, look after and "look out" for them. When I visited the weather was good so students could use the academy's extensive campus. In my discussions with staff and students they reported that during poor weather the situation is more challenging because the dining area is relatively small. Your plans to make greater use of the large main entrance area through the creation of an internet café would appear to be well judged. Your cashless system for academy lunches is not only safe and efficient but also ensures students' eligibility for free school meals remains confidential.

The academy has high expectations about punctuality and whilst this is improving too many students continue to arrive late in the morning. Attendance is rising but in view of the gap with the national average it is not improving quickly enough, particularly for students eligible for free school meals. The students I interviewed do not recognise the problem because they have formed the impression that attendance is good. Some effective work is being undertaken with parents, but

students and form tutors are not sufficiently involved in developing strategies to improve attendance and punctuality.

Students indicated that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with effectively when it occurs. Pupils know about most aspects of bullying, although the younger students interviewed were less clear about the dangers associated with possible grooming on the internet. This finding suggests you are right to plan more age focussed personal and social education in the near future.

Students have the opportunity to influence decision-making and contribute to academy improvement through their representatives on a council. However, opportunities are missed to involve students in actively developing strategies to improve attitudes to learning. Strengths in leadership were evident during the visit. Leaders have identified the urgent need to further improve teaching so as to improve attendance, punctuality and enhance students' attitudes to learning. In addition, there are signs that the new governance arrangements are making a positive contribution; for instance, in helping identify the need for more age specific personal and social education.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve students' attitudes to learning by ensuring that teaching is consistently challenging and by more effectively recognising achievement and high levels of endeavour in lessons
- ensure all students better understand all the dangers associated with the internet
- ensure the greater involvement of students in helping to improve attitudes to learning, punctuality and attendance.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Solihull, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc Chair of Interim Executive Body  
The Chief Education Officer of the Grace Foundation