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15 January 2015

David Allen  
Headteacher  
The Links AP Academy  
1 Hixberry Lane  
St Albans  
AL4 0TZ

Dear Mr Allen

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Links AP Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 14 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 October 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 improvement plan identifies regular times during the year when progress towards achieving your targets can be measured
- continue to strengthen the subject knowledge of teachers and appoint new staff with the necessary skills and expertise.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, groups of students and the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority who is providing additional support. I also evaluated the academy improvement plan. We visited every class briefly to observe students' learning and to look at the work in their books. I also scrutinised the academy's records of recruitment checks on staff.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, two learning assistants have left the academy. The academy no longer has a budget deficit.

## **Main findings**

Your academy improvement plan is detailed and rightly focuses on areas which aim to make the academy good at the time of its re-inspection. Many of your targets are measurable, but the plan would benefit from the identification of more frequent times during the year when progress made towards reaching these targets can be reviewed.

As a result of a formal timetable for the whole academic year, pupils now have much more consistency in the quality of teaching they receive. They appreciate the stability of knowing who their teacher will be throughout the year. This includes opportunities for students in Years 10 and 11 to do work experience in order to be better prepared for the world of work. You have also appointed more qualified teachers, and are measuring students' progress more regularly. This allows you to offer additional support where needed so that students do not fall behind.

You use a range of monitoring activities to judge the quality of teaching over time including observations of lessons, scrutiny of students' books and regular analyses of students' progress. Teachers' marking of students' work is detailed, but few students currently respond in writing to their teachers' guidance.

Students' attendance has improved since the previous inspection, and although it compares favourably with many students' attendance at their previous school, it remains well below the national average. Some students continue to present challenging behaviour in lessons, but staff make use of effective strategies to tackle this. Consequently, the proportion of students who are excluded from the academy has been reduced. You have forged good working relationships with other support agencies, including the local police.

Members of the governing body monitor the academy's work closely. The Academy Improvement Committee, which meets every six weeks, holds leaders and managers to account for progress made against targets in the action plan when they are identified. Governors rightly believe there is greater consistency in the academy because there are now established systems and procedures for leading and managing the academy. You acknowledge the need to only appoint permanent staff who possess the necessary skills and expertise so that you can drive improvement as quickly as possible.

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

## **External support**

You have brokered support from the local authority to monitor, review and evaluate the work of the academy. This support has been helpful in driving improvement. You have received valuable support from other schools in the Alban Schools Teaching Alliance. Colleagues from these mainstream schools have worked well with your staff to develop the quality of teaching and share good practice, often by hosting your teachers in their schools. This is helping to tackle teachers' weaker subject knowledge.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following  
Chair of the Governing Body  
Local authority  
[CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)