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29 January 2015

Andrew Scott  
Merrill Academy  
Brackens Lane  
Alvaston  
Derby  
DE24 0AN

Dear Mr Scott

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Merrill Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 28 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, the Chair, Vice-Chair and another member of the Governing Body, and with four representatives of the academy's sponsor, Derby College: the Chief Executive, the Director of Human Resources, the Human Resources Manager and the Director of Corporate Affairs. In addition, brief meetings were held with the assistant principal with responsibility for behaviour and safety, and the directors of English and mathematics. I evaluated the sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan. I accompanied you on a brief tour of the academy, where we saw the learning that was taking place.

My visit to the academy was during the fifth day of industrial action. For this reason, approximately 70% of teaching staff were not in the academy. Nevertheless, most students were attending school and the senior leadership team had, where needed, created programmes for students as alternatives to their usual lessons. The sessions visited showed students to be positively engaged in a range of activities to boost

their studies in English, mathematics and science, as well as motivational workshops supporting the academy's programmes of careers education, and personal, social and health education.

## **Context**

You have made several appointments since the last inspection. Two teachers in mathematics took up their posts towards the end of the autumn term, including one bilingual teacher who also supports students who speak English as an additional language. New appointments in humanities and art took up their posts at the start of this term. There is a new technician for art and physical education (0.8fte). You have created a new team with responsibility for setting up and maintaining the data tracking system. This includes a data manager, his deputy and the examinations officer. You have adjusted the remits of the senior leadership team so that there are clearer lines of responsibility and greater accountability for the key areas of the academy improvement plan. One vice-principal has responsibility for overseeing the regular monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

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

You have responded rapidly and are addressing effectively the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. You have been supported well by the governing body and the sponsors.

All governors are linked to key areas of the leadership of the academy. For example, the Chair takes a specific interest in behaviour, attendance and safety. The governors have deepened their understanding of the priorities for the academy. They are able to play an active and challenging role in the monitoring of progress. The external review of the use of pupil premium has not yet taken place and is due to be carried out in March 2015. In the meantime, an internal review was completed by the vice-principal as a matter of urgency. As a result of changes made in response to this review, governors now have better oversight of the use of the pupil premium and its impact. They can demonstrate an understanding of the uptake and effectiveness of interventions and opportunities funded by pupil premium.

Sponsors and governors provide an appropriate balance of practical support, mentoring, guidance and challenge for the comparatively new leadership team. There is a clear sense of partnership with sponsors and governors. There are close collaborative links between the governing body and sponsors. These are enhanced because the sponsor's Director of Corporate Affairs is now the Chair of the Governing Body. She now spends one day a week in the academy and is in regular contact with you. The sponsors draw upon areas of expertise across their organisation to support the academy. For example, the sponsor's Group Teaching and Learning Director is a key link for the leadership team in addressing areas for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Mentoring facilitated by the sponsor has developed skills and knowledge across middle and senior leadership.

The sponsor's human resources manager attends meetings of the senior leadership team and works with middle leaders to develop their skills in tackling areas for development within their teams.

Improved systems for tracking the progress students make have been put in place by the academy's new data team. The directors of English and mathematics can demonstrate their careful analysis of regular assessments, and they hold members of their teams to account when underachievement is identified. Additional support is put in place for individual students where appropriate. In order to inform planning and focus revision, the directors of English and mathematics use the same system to identify topics and styles of assessment in which students do less well. The analysis of the progress of different groups is integrated into the tracking system and there is now a clear expectation that all classroom teachers use this in their planning as a matter of routine. At this early stage, not all teachers are meeting this expectation.

The vice-principal with responsibility for behaviour and safety uses data to improve provision. He carries out a close analysis of patterns of incidence of disruptions to learning due to poor behaviour. As a consequence, senior leaders have put support in place for both students and teachers. This has led to significant reductions in 'call outs', when senior leaders are requested to support behaviour management in lessons.

You have rewritten the academy improvement plan following the last inspection and it now includes clear success measures. Both the academy improvement plan and the statement of action make reference to each area for improvement identified in the last inspection report. For each area of improvement, there are details of actions to be taken, the reasons for these actions and the ways in which the outcomes of these actions will be measured. The timeframes for implementation reflect your focus on rapid improvement. There are regular and frequent dates identified for review and evaluation against measurable success criteria. Target dates for interim review are appropriately spread. While the statement of action originally included reference to communications with parents for some sections, this is now more clearly stated, following recent work reviewing the statement of action with the local authority.

The following amendments would make the academy development plan and the statement of action more compatible:

- direct cross-reference from the improvement plan to the statement of action for ready access to the relevant, more precise success criteria contained in the statement of action
- explicit detail on how and when parents will receive communications about each area covered in the statement of the action
- highlighting the areas for improvement from the last inspection that are now integral to the academy improvement plan.

To date, the interim review of targets – for example, for Year 11 progress, the quality of teaching and the behaviour logs – has shown that targets have been met and, in places, exceeded. Both the improvement plan and the statements of action are working documents and targets should be revised regularly on the basis of this success.

Senior leaders have a realistic understanding of their priorities. This is reflected in the shared responsibilities seen in the academy improvement plans and statement of action, overseen by your determination and high expectations of staff and students.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Derby, the Chief Executive of Derby College, the DfE Academies Adviser Unit and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

**Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies**, the post-inspection letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where the school is an academy)
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [[open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)] - for academies, free schools, UTCs and studio schools
- The lead inspector.