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Colin Boxall
Principal
Grace Academy Coventry
Wigston Road
Coventry
CV2 2RH

Dear Mr Boxall

Special measures monitoring inspection of Grace Academy Coventry

Following my visit with Julia Morris, Additional Inspector, and Susan Vasey, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 3–4 March 2015, 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 third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. 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 may appoint two newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection: one to the English department and one to the mathematics department.

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 Education Funding Agency, the Academies Advisers Unit, the Chair of the Academy Improvement Board and the Director of Children's Services for Coventry.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the academy so that it is good or better by:
 - ensuring that all teaching motivates and inspires students
 - providing training for temporary teachers to improve their subject knowledge and skills, and ensure that they are well-prepared for their lessons
 - raising expectations of how students behave and what they can achieve
 - ensuring teachers give students opportunities to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills in interesting contexts in a range of subjects
 - making sure that students' work is marked in a way that gives them clear guidance about how it can be improved.

- Improve behaviour and reduce the number of students who are temporarily excluded from school by ensuring that all staff understand and consistently apply the academy's expectations for good behaviour.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the systems for collecting, analysing and acting on data about students' progress are consistently applied across the academy
 - spending of additional government funding (pupil premium) is used effectively to raise the attainment of those pupils it is intended to support
 - staffing is stabilised so that students have greater continuity in their learning
 - all leaders are rigorously held to account for the performance of all groups of students so that they are able to drive forward improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour
 - courses offered to sixth-form students meet their academic needs
 - governors regularly and rigorously hold academy leaders to account for all aspects of performance and check that actions taken are leading to improvements.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3–4 March 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, inspectors observed students' learning in 27 lessons. A range of subjects was seen. Meetings were held with the Principal, academy leaders, a member of the Academy Improvement Board (AIB) and a representative of the sponsor, The Grace Foundation. Discussions were held with students and members of staff. The views of parents were noted from the 11 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) and the 107 responses to the academy's own questionnaire to parents. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the academy's analysis of students' current attainment and progress, records of monitoring undertaken by academy leaders of the quality of teaching, and the minutes of meetings of the Academy Improvement Board. Additional documentation was scrutinised, including information about students' behaviour, attendance and punctuality, and the vetting checks on staff new to the academy.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2014, two teachers have joined the science department. No teachers have left the academy. The local governing body has been replaced by an Academy Improvement Board (AIB). The AIB was established on 19 January 2015. The Department for Education carried out a monitoring visit on 28 January 2015. The academy is in the early stages of consulting with staff and unions over staff redundancies.

Achievement of students at the academy

Information provided by the academy, work in students' books and observations of students' learning show that, since the last monitoring inspection visit, the quality of teaching and students' behaviour are much improved. Staffing is now stable and no teachers have left the academy since the inspection in November 2014. As a consequence, students' progress has speeded up in most subjects across the academy.

In Year 11, an increasing number of students, including those that are disadvantaged, more able or are disabled or have special educational needs, are making the progress expected of them in English and mathematics. The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and other students is closing. Information provided by the academy shows that, in English, the gap has reduced from half a grade to a third of a grade. In mathematics, the gap has been reduced from a grade to half a grade. However, while improving, the majority of students' ability to problem-solve and reason mathematically remains weak across the academy.

Academy leaders have introduced a commercial reading scheme and focused on the development of students' writing skills across all subjects. As a result, students' literacy skills have improved. For example, in Year 9, 54% of students have improved their reading age by at least six months in two months. The work in students' books shows that, since the last inspection, students' writing skills, including handwriting, have improved.

In Key Stage 3 and Year 10, an increasing number of students are making the progress expected of them in the majority of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.

In the sixth form, students are following courses that are suited to their academic needs and ability. As a consequence, more students than last year are continuing with their studies. Information provided by the academy shows that students' progress is speeding up in academic and vocational subjects, especially in psychology.

The quality of teaching

Teachers and teaching assistants have had training and support to improve their subject knowledge and teaching skills, including how to provide effective feedback to students. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving, particularly in the sixth form. A large majority of the students told inspectors that their lessons are now more interesting and that the feedback they receive is useful in helping them to improve their work. The work in students' books shows that teachers have higher expectations of what students know, understand and can do.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers plan appropriate learning opportunities and frequently check that students understand the work. As a result, they adapt their lesson to meet the changing needs of individuals in order to ensure students make progress. However, a minority of teachers do not use the information they have about students' knowledge and understanding to plan learning activities that cater for students' different capabilities. In addition, checks are not made on students' understanding and progress. The majority of students in these classes find the work either too hard or too easy. As a result, students do not make the progress they should.

The majority of teachers frequently mark students' books and provide feedback that gives students clear guidance about how their work can be improved. However, a minority of teachers do not frequently mark students' books, identify students' mistakes and misconceptions or check that follow-up work has been completed. As a result, students' progress is inhibited.

Students have opportunities to read throughout the academy day; for example, in tutor time and in the majority of lessons. The recently introduced commercial

reading scheme has been well received by students, and most are reading more often than was the case at the last inspection. Students have opportunities to write for extended periods of time in most subjects. As a result, information provided by the academy shows that students' literacy skills are improving.

Since the last inspection, the teaching of mathematics has improved and more students are making the progress expected of them. However, many students do not have secure basic arithmetical skills. As a result, they are unable to confidently solve problems. The work in the majority of students' books shows that they have few opportunities to reason mathematically, to problem-solve or to deepen their understanding. Students do not have a secure understanding of how and why mathematical and arithmetical methods work. Teachers of mathematics do not have a secure understanding of the new mastery curriculum and the implications for lesson design, teaching, use of resources and support for students.

Teaching assistants support students' learning effectively. They do this by encouraging students to think for themselves and to be resilient when encountering problems. Teaching assistants also support teachers in ensuring that students focus on their work and complete tasks to an acceptable standard.

Behaviour and safety of students

Since the inspection in November 2014, students' behaviour has improved significantly. The Principal has introduced an 'open door' policy, requiring all teachers to teach with the classroom door open. Most staff and students told inspectors that this policy has had a positive impact on students' behaviour. However, students' behaviour deteriorates when teaching fails to engage the interest of students or meet their particular learning needs.

The majority of teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour. However, a minority of teachers do not consistently apply the academy's behaviour policy and do not effectively challenge the minority of students who persistently disrupt the learning of others.

Academy leaders are visible around the academy site and regularly visit lessons to ensure that students are meeting the academy's behaviour expectations. Students' behaviour at break and lunchtime is 'excitable' and a small minority of students can be overly boisterous. A minority of students need to be reminded by staff to move to their next lesson.

Information provided by the academy shows that there are fewer fixed-term exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour compared to the same time last year.

Students' attendance is improving and there are fewer students who are persistently absent, missing 15% or more of lessons. However, absence and persistent absence levels remain above the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal and senior leaders have taken effective action to tackle the issues identified at the inspection in January 2014 and the monitoring inspection in November 2014. As a result, the quality of learning and teaching, and students' behaviour and attainment, have improved. Teachers' and students' underperformance is challenged. Intervention and support are provided for students not making the progress expected of them and for teachers who are unable to secure the best outcomes for students. The large majority of parents who completed the academy's questionnaire said that the academy is well led and managed. An increased proportion of parents are happy with the teaching, care, support and encouragement their children receive. The Principal recognises that some policies – for example, the assessment and behaviour policies – are applied inconsistently by a minority of staff. He and other academy leaders are taking effective action to challenge teachers who do not meet the academy's expectations.

Students' progress, attendance and attitudes to learning are frequently monitored. As a result, there is ample information about students' learning, absence and behaviour. However, academy leaders do not routinely and rigorously analyse the information. As a consequence, they miss opportunities to identify and resolve issues such as students' low attendance in Year 9 and Year 11.

The recently established AIB includes a National Leader of Governance (NLG), and a National Leader of Education (NLE). Members of the AIB have a good range of knowledge and skills, and have quickly used these to provide challenge and guidance to the Principal and other leaders. They have a good understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement. However, the AIB has not had sufficient time to demonstrate a significant and sustained impact on improving leadership, management and students' achievement.

External support

The sponsor, through the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), provides suitable support for teachers and academy leaders. The CEO has brokered support from Sidney Stringer Academy and the Castle Phoenix Teaching School Alliance to work with teachers and leaders, particularly in English, mathematics and science, and to provide training for teachers through the Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP). The Principal has recently collaborated with the local authority through a school improvement partner.