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20 March 2015

Principal  
West Walsall E-ACT Academy  
Primley Avenue  
Walsall  
WS2 9UA

Dear Ms Thomas

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of West Walsall E-ACT Academy**

Following my visit with Chris Chapman, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Helen Reeves, Additional inspector, to your school on 18 and 19 March, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs), provided an appropriate induction plan is put in place for them, including support within and from outside the academy.

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 Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Deborah James  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Improve teaching so that all is good or better, particularly in English and in mathematics, by:
  - insisting that teachers set high standards for behaviour in lessons so that all students know what is expected of them and no lessons are disturbed through chatter
  - making sure that teachers make accurate assessments of the levels students are working at
  - making sure that all teachers use the information they have on students to identify gaps in their learning and tailor their teaching to effectively fill these gaps
  - making sure that teachers' marking of students' work states clearly what students need to do to improve their work and that teachers check that this has been done.
  
- Give students a better chance of succeeding in the next stage of their education or training by making sure they leave the academy able to read well and to use their skills in mathematics by:
  - improving students' reading ages so that they are closer to, or above, their actual age
  - providing students with opportunities to practise using their skills in mathematics to solve numerical problems.
  
- Close the attainment gap between those students who are eligible for the pupil premium and their peers by making sure that all teachers and leaders use the information they have about students' achievement to notice when students are not doing as well as they should and help them to catch up.
  
- Improve the impact of academy leaders at all levels by:
  - ensuring that leaders, including governors, develop an accurate understanding of the academy, based on effective use of accurate data
  - ensuring that subject leaders are held to account by senior leaders and governors for the quality of teaching in their areas.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the academy. 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 this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 March 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principle, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, a group of recently qualified teachers, two governors, a representative from the sponsor and an E-ACT system leader who supports the academy.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection a restructuring of the senior leadership team has been carried out and a new E-ACT system leader has begun working with the academy.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Current Year 11 students are receiving considerable additional support to help them reach their target grades. Although attainment for these students is still well below the national average, there has been an improvement on the standards reached in previous years.

The academy's records indicate that the proportion of Year 11 students who are making the expected progress in English from their starting points is close to national levels. Progress is slower in mathematics but is still showing an improvement over performance in previous years. Evidence from students' books, lesson observations and teachers' marking and assessment information reinforce the academy records. Year 11 students are working hard to improve their grades, with many attending after-school revision and catch-up classes.

In other year groups, where there has been less focused support and intervention, progress varies across different groups of students. Disadvantaged students are not doing as well as other students in the academy. Senior leaders are aware of this and urgently reviewing how they spend the pupil premium funding that supports these students. Boys are not doing as well as girls in many subjects. This is particularly evident in English, where in some year groups they are making much slower progress than girls. Boys are also more likely to behave less well in lessons, not trying hard enough with their work and allowing themselves to become distracted.

Standards in reading are low on entry to the academy. Considerable progress has been made by students with the lowest reading ages as a result of reading intervention programmes. Other students are reading more books, with compulsory reading time now a part of the academy curriculum. However the impact of this additional reading focus has not yet been measured.

Very few students make more than the expected levels of progress. This is particularly evident among the most able students, who are not stretched to reach the highest A\* and A grades.

In the sixth form, leaders have revised the entry requirements from September 2014 to ensure that students are on appropriate courses. Although this has resulted in a much smaller number of students joining the sixth form in Year 12, leaders are confident that this action will lead to much higher levels of achievement. Current information about students' attainment indicates an increase in overall achievement across a range of subjects. Some students have been successful in achieving mathematics and English GCSEs at grade C or above. Timetabled lessons support the students who have yet to gain these qualifications.

### **The quality of teaching**

The actions taken by leaders to improve teaching are now having a positive impact on the quality of teaching across the academy, including in the sixth form.

Teachers are applying the training that they have undertaken to their classroom practice. This is particularly evident in teachers' more skilful use of questioning. Teachers target questions at individual students to test their learning, and insist that students expand their answers or offer more detailed explanation. As a result, students are encouraged to think more deeply. Teachers' planning of lessons is more focused on making sure that students have made gains in their learning by the end of the lesson. Many teachers now give students a clear understanding of what they need to have learned by the end of lesson.

Teachers' marking is also improving and teachers are increasingly following the academy's marking policy. In the majority of books, teachers identify what students have done well and state what students need to do to make their work better. In the best examples, such as in English, students are then given time to act on this guidance and make improvements to their work. This helps them to make progress and close any gaps in their learning. However, this practice is not yet consistent. Sometimes teachers offer advice that is not helpful because it is not focused on subject-specific skills.

There is still too much variability in the quality of teaching. Some teachers' expectations of what students can achieve in lessons are not high enough. In some lessons, the pace of learning is too slow or tasks are not made interesting, so students become bored and restless. Some teachers do not insist that students take pride in their work and accept work from students that is incomplete or poorly presented. Insufficient demands are made of how much students write or the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Teachers now have a greater awareness of the need to use the information that they are given about their students to plan their lessons. A small but growing number of teachers use this information to set different tasks and activities for students in their classes so that all students are challenged to learn well. For example, in a Year 8 religious education lesson, the teacher directed students to start on different questions depending on what they already knew or could do. After the teacher checked their work, they then moved on to a more difficult question. This meant that students made good progress. However, students, particularly the most able, are often not given work that is challenging enough. As a result, they make less progress than they are capable of.

The lack of permanent teachers in subjects such as science is a considerable barrier to students experiencing good teaching in all areas of their study. Some students expressed their concerns about this to inspectors because they felt that this was having a negative impact on their achievement.

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

Students' behaviour in lessons shows clear signs of improvement since the last monitoring inspection. The academy's records indicate fewer exclusions and less disruption in lessons. However, not all teachers expect the highest standards of students' behaviour and students are more likely to disrupt learning where lessons are not engaging or interesting. Boys in Years 8 and 9 are most likely to be given fixed-term exclusions from the academy, affecting their learning and limiting their progress.

Students in the sixth form behave well, although the academy does not benefit from them as role models as they have limited involvement with younger students.

Outside of lessons, students were less boisterous and lesson transitions more purposeful than earlier in the year. Students are generally polite and courteous and were keen to engage inspectors in discussion. Students are proud of the improvements in their academy and have good standards of uniform. More staff are taking responsibility to ensure students follow the behaviour guidelines at break and lunchtime and help to get them to lessons on time.

The academy is working more closely with families to reduce the numbers of students who are regularly absent from the academy. Attendance has improved on the previous year and is approaching national average. The number of students who are late for school is reducing but remains far too high.

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

The new Principal clearly articulates the priorities for improvement and she has the full support of staff and students in putting in place the policies and procedures that

will enable the academy to move forward. External reviews have taken place of the sixth form and of the quality of teaching. They are thorough, detailed and offer the academy useful information that supplements the evidence gathered from leaders' regular monitoring routines. As a result, leaders have a more accurate view of the effectiveness the academy and know what needs to be done to secure further improvements.

The Principal has worked closely with E-ACT and governors to restructure the senior leadership team, ensuring roles are carefully matched to skills. A new line management structure for senior and middle leaders makes clear who is responsible for doing what. Senior leaders understand how their priorities link to the academy improvement plan and they are beginning to measure the impact of their actions.

The academy now provides a wealth of student tracking information to help subject and pastoral leaders identify students who are underachieving. A new system to provide senior leaders with a summary of the important trends and patterns in data is in place for Year 11 and is effective in helping them identify underachieving groups. However information about other year groups is currently in a less accessible format.

The academy has reorganised students into year groups for their pastoral support, creating the new role of progress leaders who take responsibility for raising achievement and delivering intervention and support across year groups. It is too early to see the impact of this new system, although there is already evidence of increased contact with parents and carers and more mentoring support for students who are not meeting their target grades.

Leaders are becoming more successful in their work to improve the quality of teaching in the academy. Training for teachers is well planned and based on a more realistic understanding of the needs of teachers in the academy than has been the case in the past. There is considerable support available for individual teachers and structured programmes are in place to tackle weaker teaching. Many teachers spoke highly of the support provided to improve their teaching. The academy's records now show that there is less inadequate teaching and a growing, but still not high enough, proportion of teaching that is good.

Subject leaders are making better use of student tracking information and have a more consistent approach to providing support for underachieving students. They are more involved in monitoring the work of their teams through lesson drop-ins and scrutiny of students' work. They also access a training programme and are being more closely held to account by their line managers. While skills of middle leaders are developing, inconsistencies in the quality of students' work, application of academy policies and the quality of teaching across the academy show that the impact of middle leaders is still too variable.

Since the previous visit, a new leader has taken on responsibility for behaviour in the academy. A new system has now been set up that draws together a wide range of information about students' conduct, including rewards, sanctions and attendance. An important strength of the system is that it enables leaders to evaluate how well students are following the academy's code of conduct, known as the 'West Walsall Way'. This system also enables leaders to check students' behaviour in different lessons, so that support can be offered to teachers who need it. It is too early to fully assess the impact of this system.

There is an intense focus to help disadvantaged students in Year 11 reach their target grades. Leaders understand that such a narrow focus will not deliver long-term success for all students and have plans in place to broaden the intervention and support for students eligible for the pupil premium in the next academic year.

Governors are continuing to strengthen the capacity and skills of the governing body and they are playing a fuller role in holding the academy to account. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and have been fully involved in monthly monitoring meetings, along with the sponsors. Governors carefully question senior leaders during governing body meetings to ensure they fully understand the information presented. They challenge E-ACT to ensure they are providing appropriate levels of support for the academy.

E-ACT continue to provide regular subject-specific support for subject leaders in English and mathematics. Staff have found these meetings very useful and they have now been extended to include science, modern foreign languages and humanities. E-ACT also fund a lead practitioner in science and provide support for governance. The human resources support from E-ACT has been highly valued by the Principal. She has also found the support and challenge provided by the E-ACT system leader, who works with the academy on a weekly basis, very useful in developing the strategic capacity of the leadership team. The system leader has also effectively supported the academy in identifying the impact of actions, refining information sharing and improving the quality of teaching.