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Damian Burgess
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Burgess

Special measures monitoring inspection of Park Hall Academy

Following my visit with Additional Inspectors Balbir Kaur-Pierpoint and Jonathan Gardiner, to your academy on 16–17 April 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. 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.

I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

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 Solihull, the Education Funding Agency and the DfE Academies Advisors Unit.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve teaching so that a higher proportion is consistently good or better by all teachers:
 - using accurate assessment information to plan interesting work for students so the level of challenge is matched to their ability and enables all students to make good progress
 - making lessons more interactive and enjoyable so students develop their skills in working independently or in groups
 - giving students clearer feedback during lessons and in marking so they know how to improve their work
 - developing their use of probing questions to stimulate students' greater involvement in discussions and to deepen their understanding.

- Improve behaviour in lessons and around the school by:
 - staff having higher expectations of how students conduct themselves and ensuring that low-level disruption in lessons is eradicated
 - students improving their punctuality to lessons and developing more positive attitudes to learning.

- Develop the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - a simple, accurate system, understood by all staff and governors, is used to check on students' progress and identify where extra help is needed to support students making slow progress
 - monitoring and evaluation by senior and subject leaders is more rigorous so that all policies are implemented consistently throughout the academy
 - judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate and take account of the amount of progress students make
 - teachers are given clear next steps for improvement after leaders observe lessons, and that these are followed up to make sure that they have made a difference
 - the governing body checks that there are clear actions in the school development plan that will improve teaching and students' achievement, and that these are monitored regularly so that academy leaders are held to account.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 16-17 April 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Executive Principal, Headteacher, senior leaders and leaders of other areas of the academy and the Chair of the Governing Body. Twenty-five lessons were observed, including eight that were observed jointly with a senior leader. An inspector also carried out two short visits to sixth form lessons with a senior leader. Inspectors spoke with students during lessons and at break and lunchtime. Inspectors also met formally with groups of students from Years 7, 11 and the sixth form.

Context

Greater stability at senior leadership level has been secured through the change in your position from Interim Principal to your appointment as Headteacher, with effect from 1 January 2015. At the same time, a new senior leader appointed as director of science started in the academy. Effective coverage of the responsibility for leading on teaching and learning has continued efficiently through a senior leader who works across both Park Hall Academy and the partner school, following the very recent departure from the academy of another senior leader. Seven teachers left the academy at the end of the autumn term and have all been replaced. The long-awaited transition to the multi-academy trust arrangement between Park Hall Academy and Arden has been finalised and this formally commenced on 1 April 2015. Governors have undergone a further restructuring and a new Chair of the Governing Body is now in place.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although attainment is likely to continue to be below the national average, better outcomes than in 2014 are indicated, with almost half of Year 11 currently 'on track' to attain five or more GCSE grades at A*-C including English and mathematics. Progress is improving, especially in English, where a similar proportion of students than is seen nationally are making the progress they should. Improvements in mathematics are slower and fewer than half of Year 11 students are making their expected progress. Very few students make good progress in English and mathematics.

Gaps in attainment and progress between disadvantaged students and others in the academy are set to narrow from that seen in 2014. Disadvantaged students in English are on course to attain about half a GCSE grade below that of other students in the academy and with other students nationally. Gaps are wider in mathematics and disadvantaged students are about a whole GCSE grade behind other students in the academy and compared with others nationally. Progress made by disadvantaged students in English is improving and the gap within the academy is indicated to

close, with a narrowing of the gap with the attainment of other students nationally. In mathematics, although disadvantaged students are making better progress, the gap with other students nationally remains unacceptably wide. Only about a third of disadvantaged students in Year 11 are indicated to make the progress they should in mathematics.

Progress and attainment in English tend to be stronger than that seen in mathematics in most year groups. In Year 9, fewer than half the students in the year group have made the progress they should in English and only about a third have made the progress they should in mathematics. There are early signs of improvement in Years 7 and 8 but senior leaders need to monitor this situation carefully to identify gaps in earlier learning and intervene to fill these gaps at the earliest signs of progress slowing.

Literacy development is improving as a result of a much sharper approach to improving reading; there is a consistent focus across the academy on key words and subject terminology which students and teachers refer to as 'command words'. Where students need extra help with reading, they receive targeted intervention and support to help them to improve their skills, which includes use of phonics (the sounds linked to letters) in addition to an accelerated reader programme. Further steps should be taken to identify Key Stage 4 students who need further support to improve their literacy skills.

Students' achievements seen during lessons and from their work in books show they are starting to benefit from better teaching and stability in staffing. There are now very few temporary teachers in the academy and permanent teachers to replace these have been appointed from September 2015.

Year 12 attainment and progress is on course to improve for 2015 compared with that of 2014. A more sophisticated approach to monitoring and checking on the progress being made includes the use of a mock examination taken by all sixth form students in December and this is used to tailor intervention to address individual weaknesses seen. More aspirational targets are now set for all sixth form students.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving rapidly, supported by the academy being successful in reducing weaker teaching through changes to staffing. Where teaching has been identified as 'not yet good', support programmes are in place for teachers. During this inspection, teachers were seen to have benefited from being coached by those with stronger practice and teachers previously on support programmes were seen to have improved their teaching skills. Some weaknesses in teaching still exist such as in mathematics and physical education. Progress is slow where the level of challenge is not appropriate for all students and they are given work which is too easy, too repetitive, or too difficult for their needs. In a physical education lesson, some

students were not fully engaged as they did not have enough work to do. In a mathematics lesson, the planned work on drawing graphs moved on too quickly to curves before students had mastered equations of a straight line.

Marking continues to improve and students told inspectors that their work is marked more regularly than in the past and they value the help they are given to improve their work. There are still inconsistencies in the quality of marking. The school marking policy expects students to act upon the feedback given by teachers but sometimes students are not given sufficient time to do this well.

The quality of support provided by teaching assistants varies. Where this is good and leads to students making better progress, work is adapted to meet the needs of students. Teaching assistants carefully explain what is required, rather than telling students the answers or focusing on trying to keep students on task. Teaching assistants require further training to ensure they become more effective in their role.

Although academy data indicate improvements in teaching based on observations, this is not reflected in better progress overall. For example, students in Year 9 do not all make the progress they should. There is also not enough progress in mathematics. Academy leaders need to take further steps to make sure that judgements given on the quality of teaching take into account the progress being made by students seen in their outcomes.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attendance and persistent absence remain broadly similar to the levels of 2014/15. The academy has introduced its own 'truancy officer' who supports students experiencing difficulty in attending regularly and arriving at the academy on time. Students are also further encouraged to attend after-school support sessions and transport is provided for them to ensure they arrive home safely.

Some low-level disruption was seen around the academy following lessons taught by temporary teachers whose strategies to manage behaviour are not always as effective as other teachers in the academy. Teachers told inspectors that good behaviour is encouraged through their rewarding positive behaviours more frequently rather than drawing attention to undesirable behaviour. Reminders for good conduct are needed less frequently by students, who are starting to take greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour.

Incidents of undesirable behaviour are higher for Year 7 than for other year groups. Academy leaders told inspectors about students who present serious and challenging behaviours which they say is a result of a lack of effective support to improve these behaviours in the past; some of which have continued from primary school. There have been five permanent exclusions so far this year, of which three have been from

students in Year 7. Exclusion is only used as a last resort and follows where other strategies, including support from external agencies, have failed.

Following the appointment of a new co-ordinator for personal, social and health education (PSHE), the PSHE course content and delivery has been substantially revised. British values are actively promoted and students have a more structured approach to finding out about issues related to keeping themselves safe and healthy. The current approach to 'immersion days' is being reviewed and, from September, all Key Stage 4 students will receive weekly timetabled PSHE lessons. A team of teachers will deliver the new PSHE course throughout the academy ensuring a more consistent approach to the way this course is taught. Sixth form students have the opportunity to study PSHE themes through their enrichment course.

Year 11 students spoke highly of the additional support that is being provided to help them to improve their progress in a wide range of subjects. They greatly appreciate this support and this is reflected in good attendance at the optional after-school 'Period 6' classes.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior leaders have continued to drive further improvements in the academy, working collaboratively with other leaders from the partner school. Some of these seconded posts have now become permanent positions, which continue to strengthen the capacity of senior leaders to improve the academy further. Since the last inspection, new systems introduced to improve teaching and to better manage behaviour are more securely established, leading to a more consistent approach by teachers across the academy. Subject leaders continue to be robustly held to account and meetings to moderate the work of students now take place twice each half-term to ensure that assessment information is accurate. Assessments have been externally validated through leaders from the partner school.

Academy leaders know that the way to improve outcomes is through making sure that all students benefit from good teaching. Regular monitoring of teaching through lesson observations, short visits to lessons and checks on students' work in books contributes to senior leaders' views on the strengths of teaching and the areas still to improve. This is effective because this information is used to take prompt and decisive action to improve teaching and to provide individual support for teachers to address specific weaknesses. It is essential this approach to monitoring continues.

Leaders of mathematics have not yet reviewed their Key Stage 3 curriculum and resources to ensure a consistent approach is seen to teaching topics across the department. Guidance in schemes of work on the most appropriate teaching approach to use would be helpful to ensure conceptual development is encouraged

and the good practice seen during the inspection in some lessons is shared with all teachers of mathematics.

Academy leaders do not routinely present information to governors which accurately compare the gaps in attainment and progress for disadvantaged students with others nationally for each year group. It is recommended that governors ask for this information and use it to evaluate the impact of pupil premium spending.

Governors have undergone a further restructuring following the transition to a multi-academy trust. A skills audit has highlighted additional training needs and some of these are already being tackled, such as an improvement to the way in which notes of meetings are recorded. A further independent review of governance at this stage would be useful to report on any other aspects of governance that could be improved and any recommended actions taken before the next inspection.

External support

External support continues to be effective and a range of external reviews have been carried out, using the academy improvement partner and other consultants. This includes a review of provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs and opportunities to 'stretch and challenge' students further.