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5 June 2015

Thomas Johnston  
Principal  
The Earls High School  
Furnace Lane  
Halesowen  
B63 3SL

Dear Mr Johnston

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Earls High School**

Following my visit with Alun Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 4 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) and behaviour and attendance at the academy.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors met with the Principal, senior leaders and other staff, groups of students, and two representatives of the Governing Body. Inspectors also scrutinised documents relating to the achievement of disadvantaged students, minutes of governors' meetings and information about attendance and behaviour. They also examined the academy's self-evaluation and improvement plans and the lead inspector made brief visits to a small number of lessons.

### **Context**

The Earls High School converted to an academy in January 2012. It has not been inspected as an academy but the predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in November 2011. Since becoming an academy, there have been a number of changes of staff in the English department, the governing body has been reconstituted and named governors have responsibility for students who are supported by the pupil premium and looked after children. A senior member of staff is the designated teacher for looked after children and a senior leader has an

overview of the achievement, behaviour and attendance of students known to be eligible for free school meals.

The academy is a larger than average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average and fewer than 10 students are in the care of the local authority. Most students are of White British background and few students have a first language which is not English. The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs is below average.

The Academy is the lead school in The Earls High Teaching School Alliance. The Principal is a National Leader of Education and there are three Specialist Leaders of Education on the staff.

## **Achievement**

In 2014, the Year 11 cohort of 38 disadvantaged students made considerably less progress than their peers at the academy. In English 45% of disadvantaged students achieved the expected levels of progress compared to 70% of other students and 13% of disadvantaged students made above expected progress compared to 22% of other students. In mathematics 53% of disadvantaged students achieved expected progress compared to 81% of other students and 8% of disadvantaged students made above expected progress compared to 28% of other students. As a result of their poor progress, only 39% of disadvantaged students reached the key benchmark of five or more GCSEs at A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, compared to 68% of their peers.

The proportion of disadvantaged students who have achieved five or more A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics, declined between 2012 and 2014 and the attainment gap widened in 2014. Progress declined markedly in English during this time and the achievement gap has widened in this subject. The attainment gap in mathematics has reduced over the last three years. Progress in mathematics improved between 2012 and 2013 but, as the most able students in this subject did not make rapid progress, it declined in 2014. For current students, the academy has secure tracking information that indicates disadvantaged students are making better progress that is much closer to others in the academy. There has been a marked improvement in English but the most able students in mathematics still do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders have identified reasons for the poor performance of disadvantaged students in 2013 and 2014. Regular academy tracking information had identified that these students were not doing well and although interventions and support were put in place some were not effective in improving outcomes. Academy leaders have now refined their actions as a result of a systematic evaluation of their impact but, although there is evidence of improved achievement for disadvantaged students across subjects and year groups, this is not consistent.

## **Behaviour and attendance**

Staff consciously model positive behaviour to all students and provide a range of activities and responsibilities to build confidence, raise aspirations and prepare students for life in modern Britain. Disadvantaged students are actively encouraged to make the most of these opportunities. For example, they are supported to play musical instruments, lead learning in lessons, read regularly, take part in public speaking, look after visitors, undertake outdoor pursuits, represent the academy at other schools, visit universities and take part in a variety of other extra-curricular activities. The clear focus on holistic development while promoting positive behaviour to improve learning was evident in all the interactions inspectors had with students during the inspection.

Attendance of disadvantaged students has improved since the academy opened and a smaller proportion of disadvantaged students are regularly absent than previously. However, the absence, including regular absence, of disadvantaged students is still much higher than that of other students in the academy. Similarly, exclusion rates of disadvantaged students have improved since 2012 but they remain much higher than their peers.

Disadvantaged students told inspectors that they receive good advice on options and careers choices so they are clear about their future destinations and career paths on leaving the academy. However, a smaller proportion of disadvantaged students maintain their destinations once they leave Year 11 than other students and a larger proportion do not go onto education, employment or training. As academy leaders rely on an external agency to track destinations, they do not have an internal system to monitor what students do when they leave The Earls High School.

Work with parents, including those of disadvantaged students, is increasingly effective. Academy staff are quick to inform parents of issues and to support them where they have concerns. As the support for students who are looked after is robust and effective, the achievement and attendance of children in the care of the local authority is in line with other students in the academy.

## **Leadership and management**

Leaders recognised the seriousness of underachievement of disadvantaged students, and the limited impact of some previous strategies that they were using to address this. As a result, they have systematically evaluated the impact of their actions and researched good practice in order to implement effective strategies to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students across all subjects throughout the academy. For example, in order to address prior underachievement, disadvantaged students are set more challenging targets than other students in the academy. These targets are closely and regularly monitored to inform further action. This has led to improved achievement this year.

The importance of consistently high quality teaching has also been emphasised. Staff have received appropriate training and their practice is also closely monitored to ensure that all students, including disadvantaged students, learn well. Teachers and teaching assistants have been set targets related to the achievement of disadvantaged students and all staff have information about every class which identifies disadvantaged students and the strategies that they can use to improve their progress. The approach has been successful in focussing and galvanising staff at all levels.

Information about attendance, exclusions and the uptake of additional activities is also closely monitored to inform action. However, the priority given to the analysis of achievement information about disadvantaged students is not replicated in all areas of the academy's work. For example, destinations are not monitored closely.

Governors are well informed about outcomes for disadvantaged students. They are aware of the scale of the gap in 2014 and that predicted results indicate the gap is set to narrow in 2015. They know how much money the academy receives for pupil premium and how it is spent. An identified governor has responsibility for disadvantaged students but, as this is part of a wider remit, he has not produced separate reports on their achievement.

The governing body receives regular and detailed updates on the range of activities the additional funding provides. However, as they have not been provided with information which helps them to clearly understand which activities have been most successful, governors are not fully aware of their impact. As a result, they are not able to hold senior leaders to close account.

### **External support**

The academy has received effective support from the local authority's Looked After Children Education Services and staff have worked with a number of partners in order to share best practice in improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.

### **The strengths in the academy's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged students effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- The achievement of disadvantaged students is improving.
- Academy leaders have developed effective systems to track the progress of all students, including disadvantaged students. Reliable achievement information is collected regularly and an analysis of the performance of different groups of students is produced.
- Improving the achievement of disadvantaged students is clear priority in the academy. They are set aspirational targets, early intervention takes place if they are not on track to meet these targets and their achievement

is measured against the progress and attainment of other students in the school and other students nationally.

- Academy leaders systematically evaluate their actions in improving the achievement of disadvantaged students, seek out best practice and modify their approach as a result.
- Disadvantaged students benefit from a range of activities to raise their aspirations and self-confidence. They are encouraged to take responsibility, read regularly and participate in a number of extra-curricular activities.
- Staff modelling positive behaviour is impacting upon the behaviour of disadvantaged students and has helped to improve attendance and reduce exclusions.
- All students, but particularly disadvantaged students, are benefiting from the academy's drive to improve learning.
- Systems to support children in the care of the local authority are strong so almost all looked after children achieve well.
- Parents are well informed and supported by the academy.
- Governors have a good understanding of how pupil premium funding is spent and know how well disadvantaged students are doing.

**The weaknesses in the academy's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged students effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- Achievement gaps remain, particularly for the most able disadvantaged students in mathematics. The achievement of disadvantaged students in Key Stage 3 is inconsistent.
- The attendance of disadvantaged students is still lower than that of other students in the school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are excluded is still higher than that of other students.
- A smaller proportion of disadvantaged students move on to education, employment and training than their peers and a higher proportion do not maintain their destination.
- The systematic analysis of achievement data does not take place in all areas of the academy's work. Consequently, academy leaders cannot take informed action to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students in these areas.

- Governors do not have a full understanding of the impact of actions funded by the pupil premium as the detail in the reports can obscure the evaluation.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged students is part of a wider remit for the named governor so it does not have a high enough profile.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Use the evaluation of the impact of strategies used in the school and the good practice observed elsewhere to continue to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- Accelerate improvements in attendance and reductions in exclusions by evaluating the actions taken so far to inform further action.
- Replicate the systematic analysis of achievement data to analyse all information about disadvantaged students. Use this information to develop strategies to further improve outcomes for disadvantaged students.
- Increase the capacity of governors to hold leaders to close account by:
  - ensuring that information about the use of pupil premium is presented to them in a way which allows them to understand fully the impact of any actions
  - separate the responsibility for disadvantaged students from the named governor's other responsibilities.

I am copying this letter to the Strategic Director-People for Dudley local authority, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

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 a school is an academy)
- For academies use the following email address:  
[CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)

**The letters should also be copied electronically to:**

- The relevant Senior HMI
- The relevant Regional Director
- Each member of the inspection team
- Marilyn Mottram HMI ([Marilyn.mottram@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Marilyn.mottram@ofsted.gov.uk))