

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 679 9154
Direct email: aidan.dunne@serco.com



5 June 2015

Robin Grover
The ACE Academy
Alexandra Road
Tipton
DY4 7NR

Dear Mr Grover

Special measures monitoring inspection of The ACE Academy

Following my visit with Additional Inspectors, William Cassell and Shahnaz Maqsood, to your academy on 3–4 June 2015, I write, on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, to confirm the inspection findings. 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to 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 Sandwell local authority.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State use the following email address:
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The lead and team inspectors.

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, especially in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan and deliver activities that have clear learning intentions and are pitched at a level of difficulty that meets the needs of all groups of students
 - students' work is accurately assessed during and after lessons so that the new work teachers then set enables all groups of students to make rapid progress
 - all marking and feedback show students exactly what they need to do to improve their work and that teachers systematically check that students quickly act upon this advice
 - teachers demand consistently high standards of work and effort from the students in their classes, especially the most-able students
 - teaching assistants receive better training in how to support less-able students who do not understand how to tackle the problems they are set
 - students have the necessary skills to solve problems and to persevere when difficulties are encountered
 - students have opportunities to develop their literacy, communication and numeracy skills in all subjects.

- Improve the support for disadvantaged students so that they make at least expected progress and that increasing numbers make more than expected progress in English and mathematics at GCSE.

- Improve the overall effectiveness of the sixth form by ensuring:
 - the statutory sixth form study programmes are fully implemented
 - good practice seen in the teaching of chemistry, biology, history and mathematics is shared with teachers of all other subjects
 - students make appropriate subject and career choices by receiving high-quality work experience, information, advice and guidance
 - the number of students leaving the sixth form before the end of their courses is reduced
 - all students who do re-sit examinations in English and mathematics at GCSE level improve their Year 11 grade.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that students' achievement and behaviour rapidly improves by ensuring that:
 - academy improvement plans identify all the key priorities for raising standards, that milestones to measure progress are challenging, specific and measurable and that

methods, timescales and staff responsible for monitoring evaluating and reviewing the work of the academy are clear

- subject leaders, including the head of sixth form, have the skills to monitor, evaluate and review their work and are held to account for students' progress
- leaders at all levels are capable of delivering improvement priorities
- current initiatives to improve the quality of teaching are embedded so that all teachers get the help, support and guidance they need to teach all groups of students effectively and, in doing so, raise achievement
- procedures to manage the performance of teachers are consistently applied so that underperformance is eradicated
- teachers promote and enforce the academy's policies on behaviour and anti-bullying so that all students feel safe while in the academy
- the curriculum more effectively supports the development of students' basic literacy and numeracy skills and meets the requirements for the teaching of religious education in Year 10
- funds available through the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding are spent appropriately so that all students eligible for this support make better progress
- members of the governing body hold leaders and managers to account for all aspects of the academy's performance.

An external review of governance and an external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3-4 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, other subject leaders and co-ordinators, the Chair and vice chair of the Governing Body and representatives from ECMAT the sponsor to the academy. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with a parent who requested to speak with an inspector during the inspection. Twenty-one lessons were observed, including 13 that were observed jointly with senior leaders. Due to the timing of the inspection it was not possible to observe any teaching and learning in Year 11 or Year 13. Inspectors spoke with students during lessons and at break and lunchtime and met formally with groups of students from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, two new vice-associate headteachers have joined the academy resulting in an associated change in roles and responsibilities for the senior leadership team. About a quarter of teachers are indicated to be leaving at the end of the academic year, with new teachers and some subject leaders due to start in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement of students in Year 11 is too low and is set to continue to be well below national values with only 40% of students indicated to be on target to achieve five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics in 2015. However, students are indicated to be making better progress than in the past in English and mathematics. Disadvantaged students in Year 11 continue to make much less progress than others in the school and only about half of these students are indicated to be making the progress they should in English and mathematics. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are set to make even slower progress with less than a third of these students in Year 11 making the progress they should in English and mathematics.

Achievement information provided by the academy for students in Year 10 indicates a continued trend of underachievement for disadvantaged students and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Inspectors saw little evidence of teachers planning work and adapting resources to help these students to catch up, or making sure that teaching assistants were effectively deployed. Not enough is being done to make sure these groups catch up quickly with other students in the academy.

Although leaders say they are now confident that teachers' predictions are accurate for Key Stage 4, they told inspectors that Key Stage 3 data cannot be trusted, particularly in English. Leaders are unable to use this information to identify students or groups who require support. Key Stage 3 students lose out because intervention work to help students to fill gaps in their learning is focused on Year 11.

Achievement in the sixth form, based on academy data, is improving. Expectations are rising. Academy leaders are challenging subject leaders to raise standards and to understand that a pass is no longer acceptable where students' ability indicates they should be aiming for a higher grade in Level 3 vocational courses.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is not improving quickly enough and academy leaders have identified that the majority of teaching is not good enough to improve learning and make up for the inadequacies in the past, especially at Key Stage 3. Assessment information cannot be used reliably in planning because it is inaccurate. Consequently, not all teachers plan activities which are either sufficiently engaging or challenging for all students. Inspectors saw occasions where students were given a choice of tasks and they chose the easier work; where data indicated they were capable of tackling harder tasks. Teachers plan 'challenge' and 'expert' tasks for the most-able, but these students do not always get to these tasks because they spend too long on the easier and less-challenging 'work for all'.

Inspectors saw diagrams drawn inaccurately in pen in mathematics. In geography, timelines drawn by students without the support of a graduated scale, and sometimes without a ruler, led to misconceptions. Sometimes teachers plan a wide variety of different activities to engage and encourage students to work together but at the expense of teaching subject content or essential knowledge such as was seen in science.

Marking is inconsistent and not all teachers are following the academy policy on correcting errors in literacy. Spelling errors in subject terminology in science are not always corrected by teachers. Handwriting is often of a poor standard and students are not given any advice on how to improve. Teachers follow the academy policy of giving students detailed information on 'what went well' and 'even better if' but the 'next extended task' given is sometimes vague, superficial or not sharply focused enough to enable students to act upon the advice given.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Academy leaders have, rightly, concentrated their efforts on improving behaviour in the academy and making sure that all students feel safe. Attitudes to learning are improving and students told inspectors that behaviour in lessons is being managed better by teachers and they acknowledge that senior leaders are raising expectations

of standards of behaviour. This was confirmed by inspectors who reported that behaviour was well managed in a large proportion of lessons seen. Students say there is very little bullying and they know that any concerns they have about this are quickly addressed by senior leaders and bullying will stop. Further work is required to review the lunchtime arrangements, which are rushed due to the short lunch break. Students eating food away from the main dining area contribute to litter and food waste left on the floors of corridors.

Exclusions continue to be high, particularly for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs. The most vulnerable students are receiving better support through 'The Hub' where learning mentors work with students on a wide range of strategies, including raising self-esteem, building self-confidence and supporting anger management. Support from external agencies, such as mental health and social care, is also provided for students who receive a tailored package of care through this vital resource base.

Checks on attendance have become more rigorous. However, it is too early to see any signs of impact on improving attendance for students who are persistently absent, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs and disadvantaged students. Punctuality is improving and fewer students now arrive late for school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Slow action taken to improve the quality of teaching for all students in the academy means that most students have little opportunity to experience good or better teaching. Too much teaching is inadequate, as it leads to students making much slower progress than they should, especially the disadvantaged, disabled and those who have special educational needs. Teachers say they are now receiving the support they need to help them to improve their skills in the classroom. They value the way this responds to individual needs identified from lesson observations, but this has only very recently started. Training has recently been delivered in improving the way in which teachers use questions to challenge students, and also planning work to meet the needs of all students, but inspectors saw little impact of this. Delays in leading improvements to teaching have resulted from a restructuring of senior leader roles, with further refinements still to be made for September, when it is hoped a stable structure will be in place.

Insufficient action has been taken to improve the literacy skills of students or to improve reading for the large proportion of students who are weak readers. Students take a reading test on entry to the academy, and this is repeated each term, but not enough is done with this information. Senior leaders are unable to show how strategies used are rapidly improving reading, or to provide any evidence of the impact of Year 7 catch-up funding. Plans to address the shortage of English

teachers from September have been made, but it remains to be seen what impact non-specialist teaching in this core area will have on raising achievement in English.

New quality assurance procedures have been introduced and these provide senior leaders with accurate information on the quality of teaching and achievement across the academy. Senior leaders meet regularly, and often, with subject leaders and are starting to challenge them over inadequacies seen in their area. The process has rigour and leads to accurate and honest self-evaluation, but subject leaders are not yet doing enough to improve teaching in their subject or the accuracy of teacher assessments at Key Stage 3.

Governors are not driving improvement by holding senior leaders to account with sufficient rigour to find out why actions taken are failing to have the desired impact. Although they have received some training in using data, they do not know enough about the impact of actions taken to accelerate progress for disadvantaged students. The review on the use of pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding has only recently been carried out, although this was recommended over six months ago, and the report has not yet been published.

Sixth-form provision is improving and a more appropriate curriculum is planned from September which provides a range of options to suit the needs of students. A 'mix and match' approach is available involving a suite of Level 2 and Level 3 academic and vocational courses. Leaders report just one Year 13 student has failed to complete their sixth form programme of study. All students now have the opportunity to take part in work experience and the quality of careers guidance, and information on apprenticeships and university and college courses, has improved. Due to external examinations, sixth-form students were not available during this inspection to share their views on sixth-form provision.

External support

The range of external support provided through the sponsor, working with outstanding providers in the area, continues to be effective. Recognising weaknesses in governance, the External Scrutiny Group has recently been created. An inaugural meeting has taken place and the notes reflect much greater challenge for senior leaders than is seen in governors meetings. This strategy provides the necessary rigour to hold senior leaders to account.