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9 July 2015

Ms Sylvia Thomas  
The 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 Helen Reeves and Sheila Boyle, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 7 and 8 July, 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 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.

I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs), providing 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors undertook 40 short visits to lessons to observe almost all teachers currently working in the academy. They scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of students, a group of recently qualified teachers, a representative from the sponsor and an E-ACT system leader who supports the academy.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection some subject areas have been grouped together to form larger faculty areas and new faculty leaders appointed. The Head of English is leaving the academy. There are 18 new staff arriving in September.

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

Year 11 students have now completed their examinations and are awaiting their results. The academy's records indicate that the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades with English and mathematics will be slightly higher than last year. Students are more likely to make the expected levels of progress in English than mathematics. The academy is also tracking progress against two new government performance measures, attainment 8 and progress 8. The academy's performance in both these measures shows an improvement over 2014 results.

Academy records show a considerable difference in the progress students are making in different subject areas. In religious education, a high proportion of students are making the expected levels of progress; in science, only a third of students make the expected progress. This closely matches what students told inspectors about their experience of learning in these lessons.

There remains a considerable gap between the achievement of boys and girls in all year groups and in many subject areas. It is particularly evident in English where, in Year 11, 81% of girls but only 64% of boys are expected to make expected progress. In Year 9 the gap in the progress made between boys and girls in English is almost 30%. In observed lessons, boys were frequently less engaged in their learning, slower to settle to their work and completed less written work than the girls in the class. There is little evidence in the academy's current tracking information that this gap is closing.

Students eligible for the pupil premium are also doing less well than their peers. There is evidence that for Year 11 students the gap is closing and intervention actions taken by the academy are having an impact. However, other year groups have received little of the available support and intervention and the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers remains too large.

## **The quality of teaching**

Since the last monitoring inspection there has been an improvement in the quality of teaching in a number of areas. This includes:

- students have increased opportunities to actively take part in their lessons with teachers using a number of strategies to help students engage more with their learning
- teachers give students more opportunities to discuss their learning, either working in pairs or groups
- teachers are making better use of questioning, with many questions targeted at individual students to check their understanding and extend their learning
- teachers now consistently apply the academy policies on assessment and marking
- students are responding well to better teaching, with evidence of stronger relationships with teachers and better behaviour in lessons.

However, there are still a number of areas that need to be improved to ensure teaching is consistently good. These include:

- not all students participate fully in lesson activities, in particular boys are less likely to quickly begin their work
- teachers do not always expect high enough standards in students' work or give students activities that are hard enough to make sure they learn something new
- many students have low literacy levels and teachers do not make the most of every opportunity to give students a chance to practise and improve their reading, writing and speaking
- although teachers are now planning more effectively for students of different abilities they do not give them different tasks in the lesson to ensure their needs are met
- some learning activities are dull and not relevant to the background and experience of the students. As a result, students rarely find learning exciting and motivating.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Attendance at the academy continues to improve, but is still just below national levels. There is very little difference between the attendance of disadvantaged students and others. However, boys do not attend the academy as regularly as girls and this difference is most noticeable in Year 10.

There has been an improvement in the punctuality of students. Students were well aware of this improvement and explained it was due to the consistent application by staff of a new punctuality policy which meant that students had a same day detention if they were late to the academy.

Students were also keen to tell inspectors that there had been an improvement in behaviour. This was also as a consequence of staff consistently using the academy

behaviour policy. There are still instances of poor behaviour in lessons, particularly when classes are taught by temporary agency staff.

Heads of department are now provided with regular updates on reported incidences of poor behaviour found through behaviour 'patrols'. This information is used to provide additional support and training for staff in dealing with instances of poor behaviour.

Opportunities for trips and enrichment visits have been uneven across year groups. Year 7 students were very appreciative of the opportunities they have received to go on educational trips, but other year groups have had fewer chances to enrich their academy experience with outside visits.

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

The Principal has been highly effective in building a cohesive team of staff, students and governors around her vision for the academy. Senior leaders have grown increasingly confident about their new roles and are rigorous in recognising the importance of measuring the impact of their actions.

The academy is preparing carefully for the autumn term. Necessary changes to the curriculum and new assessment models have been thoroughly planned. A new middle leadership role has been created to bring together the academy's work on careers advice and guidance, work experience placements and personal, social and health education. Staff have identified characteristics that they expect to find in an effective West Walsall learner: independence, resilience, reflectiveness and collaboration. These are being written into schemes of learning for the autumn term and beyond. A detailed teaching and learning plan is ready to support the 18 new teachers who will take up roles in the academy in September.

Middle leaders are showing an increasing understanding of how to use tracking data to put in place suitable interventions for underperforming students and to plan lessons that more closely match the abilities of students. In some departments, for example mathematics, students told inspectors how much better their teachers are at giving them work that challenges them to think hard. However, middle leaders do not yet feel accountable for the quality of teaching in their departments because much of the support and coaching to improve teaching are dealt with by senior leaders. There has been a thorough review of the support provided for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to identify and monitor the progress of these students. However, individual support plans do not provide enough detail for teachers on how they can support individual students in their lessons.

Senior leaders demonstrate increasing effectiveness in accurately monitoring the quality of teaching. Leaders are using a more comprehensive range of indicators, including students' work in books and achievement data, to help them understand when teachers need support to improve. There are strategies in place to improve

teaching that are tailored to individual needs and more teachers are choosing to participate in additional voluntary training sessions to improve their practice.

Governors continue to build their understanding of the effectiveness of the academy and are asking increasingly challenging questions of the Principal and senior leaders. They are currently fully involved in exploring increased collaboration between local sixth forms and providing additional support and challenge in mathematics.

### **External support**

E-ACT has provided additional support for the Principal in recruiting suitable staff. It plans to continue funding the academy's teaching and learning coach for the next academic year. It also provides well-regarded training for heads of departments and regular Principals' meetings that the Principal finds informative and valuable. The system leader, funded through E-ACT to provide additional support to the academy, meets the Principal on a weekly basis. She has also carried out a very thorough teaching review this term that provides the academy with an accurate evaluation for future improvement planning. She has also provided the academy with additional support in the English department, following the departure of the head of department earlier in the term.