

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

**T:** 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

2 November 2015

Mrs Nicole Gibbon  
Acting Principal  
St Aidan's Church of England Academy  
Hundens Lane  
Darlington  
DL1 1LL

Dear Mrs Gibbon

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of St Aidan's Church of England Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 8 October 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

This is the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocesan Director of Education for the dioceses of Durham and Newcastle and the Director of Children's Services for Darlington.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good, in order to raise achievement across all subjects, especially in mathematics, for the most-able students, those with special educational needs and disadvantaged students, by:
  - ensuring all teachers have high enough expectations of what students can achieve, especially the most able
  - using information about what students can and cannot do, when planning activities, to meet their varying needs, and challenge them all to make good progress that is sustained over time
  - planning relevant and motivating experiences that fire students' interest and help maintain their concentration and perseverance
  - ensuring all teachers systematically check students' understanding in lessons and adapt work so that students learn well
  - ensuring all teachers provide regular feedback to students about how they can improve their work, and insisting that they respond accordingly
  - deploying teaching assistants effectively in lessons to enhance individual students' learning.
  
- Improve students' behaviour in lessons, and overall attitudes to staff and each other, by:
  - ensuring all teachers promote positive relationships and a productive work ethos when they are with students
  - ensuring that the academy's policies to manage behaviour effectively are implemented systematically and used consistently well by all staff.
  
- Raise students' attendance to at least the national average and reduce the proportion of students that are absent regularly, by:
  - promoting more visibly across the academy, through the academy's website and newsletters to parents, the importance of regular attendance and its link with good achievement
  - working more closely with families whose children are regularly absent from school.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
  - ensuring middle leaders and managers feel confident, and have the necessary time, to use the academy's systems to track rigorously the progress of all groups of students and address underperformance early, to ensure all achieve equally well
  - ensuring all leaders and governors check the progress of disadvantaged students, particularly in mathematics, to narrow the gap between them and their non-disadvantaged peers, both in school and nationally
  - refining existing procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, by checking more carefully the quality of students' work over time, and their routine attitudes to learning
  - improving the relationship with parents so that any concerns raised are acted upon swiftly and successfully, and they are increasingly confident in what the academy is doing to promote their children's learning.

## Report on the third monitoring inspection on 8 October 2015

### Evidence

I met with the acting Principal, the Diocesan Director of Education for the dioceses of Durham and Newcastle, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of the senior leadership team. As well as talking with students in lessons and at breaks about their varied learning experiences, I also met with a group of eight Key Stage 4 students to talk in more detail about their learning and experience of the academy. I visited a range of English, mathematics, science and humanities lessons and scrutinised students' workbooks and folders as well as a range of academy documents.

### The quality of leadership and management at the school

- The acting Principal continues to have a clear understanding of the weaknesses of the academy and is driving improvement rigorously. She has a very clear vision of what needs to be done and her high aspirations and expectations are becoming firmly established and shared. All the students spoken with were positive about the difference she is making to their progress and well-being.
- Although governors are also clear about what needs to be done to tackle the academy's weaknesses, they have been too slow in implementing some of their strategies to address them. For example, plans to link governors with different aspects of the academy's work, including engaging more regularly with parents, have yet to be firmly established.
- The new, whole-academy approach to behaviour continues to have a positive impact. Students move around the academy with a sense of pride and purpose. They also talk enthusiastically about their work and aspirations for the future. They report that the academy is a calmer and happier place in which to learn. The number of exclusions has reduced dramatically.
- Leaders have very recently opened a separate dedicated area called a 'school within school' for students with challenging behaviour who may be at risk of exclusion. This is run by a skilled team and its purpose is to help students deal with and take responsibility for their behaviour so that they can swiftly rejoin the main school. Students within this provision say that it is having a positive impact on their behaviour and attitudes because it helps them think carefully and take responsibility for their actions so that they can do well. The academy's own records and work seen by Her Majesty's Inspector support this.
- Leaders and governors are not acting effectively enough to improve attendance. Although attendance is improving, it is not fast enough to bring about sustained improvements. This is because leaders do not focus resources precisely enough on those with the poorest attendance.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching is ensuring that the quality of marking and assessment continues to improve. Where staff carefully follow the academy-wide approach to feedback, it continues to help students' learning. Students

report that they like the way their teachers' comments and advice help them make progress. However, some staff are still failing to follow the academy approach, with some poor work going unchallenged.

- Middle leaders, supported by senior leaders, continue to improve their accuracy in monitoring the quality of teaching. However, some middle leaders still have to develop the required skills and expertise to fulfil this role effectively. The proposed linking of governors with particular aspects of the academy's work, including that of middle leaders, is a sound, but not yet implemented strategy.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The academy's systems for ensuring that students are safe are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- Although the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve, it remains too variable. Teachers use more challenging questions of students. As a result students of all abilities have more opportunities to extend and deepen their learning as staff ask 'why' and 'how' questions rather than merely checking for simple understanding.
- Her Majesty's Inspector saw effective work with the most-able students during the inspection. There were examples in mathematics and chemistry lessons, for example, where teachers' high expectations and rigorous questioning elicited enthusiastic and detailed responses from students.
- Students are taking an increased pride in their work. This is evident from the improved quality of students' presentation in their work books and folders. Where staff have high expectations in this, as in many other areas of the academy's work, students rise to them.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Although there are signs of improvement, teachers and other staff do not consistently expect enough of students. This is particularly the case with less-able students. Too often the work set for these students does not challenge them sufficiently. When there is insufficient challenge, students' interest wanes and this can lead to low-level disruption. Examples of this were seen during the inspection.
- The deployment and training of teaching assistants is improving but is still not focused precisely enough on the needs of individual students and groups of students. This is because teachers are still not involving teaching assistants enough in their planning of work for students. As a result opportunities are lost and students do not make the progress that they should.
- The gaps between the performance of disadvantaged students and their peers are still too wide. This is because leaders are still not measuring the impact of the actions the academy takes to support disadvantaged students precisely enough. Governors do not have a clear enough picture of the progress of this group of students, nor are they holding leaders to account sufficiently for their work in this important area.

- The 2015 GCSE results improved on the previous year but are still weaker than they should be. However, the academy's own data show that the increased rigour in the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is having a positive impact on students' work.

### **External support**

The academy continues to receive effective and sustained support from Whitburn Church of England Academy. This consists of leadership support and continued assistance with quality assurance.