

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Graeme Smith
Alfreton Grange Arts College
Grange Street
Alfreton
Derbyshire
DE55 7JA

Dear Mr Smith

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College

Following my visit to your school on 26 April 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The school's improvement planning is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

HMI recommends that urgent action is taken to ensure that:

- senior leaders, the interim executive board, Torch Academy Gateway Trust and The David Nieper Education Trust take immediate action to plan for, and then manage better, the transition of the school towards becoming an academy in September 2016.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the executive headteacher, the chair of the interim executive board, a senior local authority adviser and the chair of trustees for The David Nieper Education Trust. I spoke with the assistant headteacher with responsibility for behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and pupils who have special educational needs or disability. You and I observed learning in three Year 11 English classes, a Year 11 science class and a Year 9 science class. I met with a group of Year 11 pupils and spoke with them about their learning. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school improvement planning. I scrutinised the most recent information on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection conducted in September 2015, nine members of the teaching staff and 11 support staff have left the school. Five new members of teaching staff have been employed, three on a temporary basis. A department leader for English and an English lead practitioner are now in post. You have restructured the organisation of support staff and four additional support staff are now employed by the school. A restructuring of the senior leadership team is underway. Torch Academy Gateway Trust is the school's education partner. Their support, brokered by the interim executive board, includes the provision of an executive headteacher for three days a week. Between September and December 2015, there was an industrial dispute regarding changes to the school day. This dispute was resolved. The school is due to become an academy in September 2016 under the sponsorship of The David Nieper Education Trust. The governance of the interim executive board will therefore end on 31 August 2016. The education partner support, currently supplied by the Torch Academy Gateway Trust, will also cease on 31 August 2016, as will support from the local authority. You will be leaving the school and moving to a new headteacher post in June 2016. The David Nieper Education Trust has appointed a headteacher who will take up post in September 2016.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have led the school through a challenging period of change and have shown great resilience while doing this. The executive headteacher is providing you with effective support. He has been influential in ensuring that all the school's leaders keep appropriately focused on actions that make the most difference. This means that school improvement is taking place in spite of the turbulence of the last few months. The school is increasingly a better place for pupils to learn.

Leaders know the school well and are doing many of the right things, but improvement planning and monitoring require further sharpening. Leaders have adapted the school improvement plan in order to address the areas of improvement from the section 5 inspection. The plans are focused on the right things. The targets

that have been set within them are ambitious. Leaders use them as 'working documents' and regularly review the actions that have taken place. The timelines for when key actions should happen are, however, not sharp enough. There is not enough detail about the impact that some of the key actions will have. This means that leaders, including the interim executive board, cannot monitor closely whether actions have taken place quickly enough or if they have had the desired impact.

The local authority adviser recently conducted a school improvement review. This review took place over two days and involved senior leaders and the chair of the interim executive board. Some of the judgements made during this review were overly generous, particularly with regard to the quality of leadership and management. Although there has been improvement, the quality of leadership and management is not yet good

School data indicates that pupils' achievement at key stage 4 will improve in 2016, particularly within English. This subject is beginning to thrive under the new leadership of the head of department and the lead practitioner. The pace and precision of learning within English has markedly improved and pupils who need to catch up in order to make the progress they should are now beginning to do so. Data indicates that achievement within mathematics is set to be closer to the national average, but the teaching quality in this subject still varies too much. The quality of teaching across the school is inconsistent. As a result, the progress that pupils make is patchy. Pupils in key stage 3 do not make good progress and disadvantaged pupils do less well than others in the school.

Significant improvement in the way that pupils who have special educational needs or disability are identified and supported has taken place. Pupils with an education, health and care plan are making accelerated progress because they are undertaking the correct learning programme. Pupils identified for school support are following a more appropriate curriculum. The tracking of the progress made by pupils identified for school support is, however, weak.

Leaders have put in place an effective system to improve attendance. More pupils want to attend school regularly. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing. There are appropriate sanctions for those pupils arriving late. You are now insisting that pupils attend school, arrive promptly and are ready to learn. Pupils said that their school feels like a 'different place' than before the section 5 inspection.

The interim executive board is a highly skilled group of education professionals. This board understands well the challenges faced by the school leaders and has worked successfully to safeguard the long-term future of the school. The school is due to become an academy under the sponsorship of The David Nieper Education Trust in September 2016. There are no firm plans in place to make sure that a smooth transition to academy status happens and that the school's improvement continues. I intend to return to the school in order to monitor the progress that senior leaders,

the interim executive board, Torch Academy Gateway Trust and The David Nieper Education Trust have made in planning and then ensuring the school's smooth transition to academy status.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector