

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



2 November 2016

Mr S Cotton
Principal
DSL V E-ACT Academy
Southbrook Estate
Hawke Road
Daventry
Northamptonshire
NN11 4LJ

Dear Mr Cotton

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of DSL V E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 11 October 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in June 2015. 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.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the E-ACT regional education director, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Derek Myers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2015.

- Improve teaching and rapidly raise achievement for all groups of pupils in Key Stages 1 to 4 by:
 - making sure that work is always accurately matched to pupils' skills and abilities, particularly disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and the most-able pupils
 - regularly checking pupils' work in lessons so that they can improve it and are moved on to harder work as soon as they are ready, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that marking and feedback is effective in helping pupils improve their work, and teachers check that pupils have acted upon the advice they are given
 - making sure that pupils' reading ability is accurately assessed so that pupils are reading books which are at the right level.
- Raise attainment in the sixth form by ensuring that all teachers plan activities which are appropriately challenging for all students, particularly the most-able students.
- Raise achievement in the early years by making sure that:
 - the gap between boys and girls narrows by planning activities which help boys to improve their communication and language skills
 - activities in the Reception classes are always pitched at the right level for children who have attended the nursery for different lengths of time.
- Increase the impact that leaders and managers, including governors, have on improving teaching and achievement throughout the academy by:
 - checking the differences in achievement between all groups of pupils in more detail so that any weaknesses in teaching for particular groups can be tackled quickly
 - making sure that all subject leaders in the secondary phase are skilled in improving teaching and achievement
 - rigorously checking the impact of the additional pupil premium funding so that any differences in the achievement of these pupils and others close rapidly
 - improving how pupils' achievement in reading is monitored so that pupils know how to improve
 - making sure that all teachers receive detailed information about the particular needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and that they are appropriately trained to teach these pupils

- ensuring that governors fully understand the information that they receive so that they can effectively hold leaders fully to account for the work of the academy.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved
- An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 October 2016

Evidence

The inspectors met with you, the senior vice-principal (primary), the assistant principal (data), the assistant principal (behaviour and welfare), the assistant principal (pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities), the assistant principal (attendance), six heads of faculty, three members of the trust regional education team and the person responsible for maintaining the single central record. Although invited to meet with inspectors, the academy advisory group was unable to provide representation during the inspection.

Inspectors also visited lessons with the senior vice-principal (primary) and vice-principal (teaching and learning) to observe pupils' learning. In addition, inspectors met with 21 pupils and listened to their views of the academy.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including the academy improvement plan and leaders' evaluations of its implementation.

Inspectors reviewed Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, but less than 2% of parents had completed the questionnaire.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have continued to be significant changes to teaching staff and school leadership, including the appointment of 13 teachers, a vice-principal for teaching and learning, an assistant principal (attendance) and an assistant principal (behaviour and welfare). In total, more than a third of teaching staff has changed. Leaders have continued to revise the leadership and management of the academy to strengthen capacity, including the appointment of an early years leader and seven year-leaders.

Since the last inspection, there has been significant and structural change to the governance arrangements of E-ACT academies. The trust has dissolved the governing bodies and established regional education boards to act on their behalf as the accountable body. The boards are led by regional education directors. At DSLV E-ACT academy, the academy advisory group of parents supplements the regional board, to help it fulfil the duties of a governing body.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Academy leaders and the E-ACT trust have continued to build on the improvements recognised during my first monitoring visit in January 2016. They continue to take effective action to address the issues identified in the Ofsted report. In so doing,

senior leaders have evaluated the impact of their post-inspection action plan and have planned to take further action to address the areas for improvement and weaknesses they have subsequently identified. In addition, they have reviewed and, if necessary, revised all of the academy's systems and processes. The raising achievement board and then the regional education board support leaders well and hold them to account. The improvement plan is a working document, which is evaluated on a regular basis in terms of implementation and outcomes, including teaching and pupils' progress.

Since the last monitoring visit, senior leaders and faculty leaders have increasingly used a range of effective systems and processes to improve both the quality of teaching and the outcomes of the pupils. Heads of faculty meet regularly with their teachers to review pupil progress and to determine support for pupils at risk of falling behind. They in turn report to senior leaders and ultimately the trust board. Through this process, those pupils who are at risk of underachieving are identified and strategies such as mentoring or bespoke learning programmes are provided to support the pupils to achieve good outcomes.

Leaders have continued to improve the leadership and capacity of the academy by recruiting new staff and providing effective professional development.

Leaders have managed the performance of staff well, using a range of effective processes and strategies including a suitable programme of monitoring and feedback. They have also provided teachers with effective professional development ranging from personal support and coaching to generic training. As a result, leaders' evaluation of teaching indicates that the profile of teaching has improved and leaders now judge most teaching good.

School pupil performance information shows that where leaders have improved teaching, pupils have made better progress and achieved well, such as in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 and writing and mathematics at key stage 2. Pupils' achievement improved at key stage 4 in 2016 so that it was above the government's minimum expectations. However, in some subjects, including secondary science and reading at key stage 2, pupils' outcomes are yet to be affected by improvements in teaching.

Since the last inspection, leaders have reviewed the arrangements they make for post-16 students and have restructured the provision in partnership with another E-ACT provider to meet the needs in the local area. There is now a greater focus on English and mathematics and a range of level 2 and 3 vocational courses are available.

Leaders have also revised the complaints procedure and it is now up to date and on the website. It is a three-tier system, which initially involves a senior leader, then the principal, and finally the regional team. Clear records are kept,

including actions taken, and leaders, including the regional education team, review cases regularly and in depth. The inspectors found no evidence that this system does not work effectively and, in those cases reviewed at tier three, staff had acted in line with academy policies.

The arrangements leaders make for safeguarding are effective. All pupils who spoke with the inspectors agreed that they are safe in school and that they know who to go to if something is bothering or upsetting them. They report that behaviour is good overall and that if there were any poor behaviour, including bullying, staff would deal with it well and promptly. A very few pupils who told inspectors that they had been bullied previously are now confident that should it happen again it would be dealt with quickly. Pupils recognise that teachers teach them to be safe at school and in the wider community; for example, pupils learn about 'stranger danger'. Pupils also explained how staff teach them to be safe online.

Leaders have established a large welfare team, led by an assistant principal (behaviour and welfare), 11 of whom are trained as designated safeguarding leads. This team ensures that staff are well informed and well trained. The welfare team review cases regularly and frequently and they are held to account by senior leaders and the regional education team.

Leaders have also revised the system for managing behaviour and provided additional training for staff since the last inspection. Academy monitoring information indicates that this has resulted in a significant reduction in incidents of inappropriate behaviour.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers have improved the feedback they provide to pupils. Inspectors observed teachers checking pupils' learning in lessons and providing them with further guidance and support. A small sample of pupils' books also shows that the written feedback clearly tells pupils when they have been successful and what they need to do next. Pupils told inspectors that teachers give them time to respond to these comments.
- The small sample of pupils who read to the inspector were accurately assessed by their teachers and were reading suitably challenging books. They read well and with expression. When they did not recognise a word they applied their understanding of phonics to sound the word.
- The new early years leader has quickly gained a comprehensive overview of early years and recognises that a key area for improvement is communication and language. Children's learning is now informed by an assessment of their needs as well as the curriculum plan. Leaders and staff have introduced a range of effective strategies to support further improvement, including:
 - rigorous tracking of individual children and groups
 - additional training for staff on speech and language
 - reintroducing home visits

- modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of groups of pupils
 - working with parents to enable them to support their child with their reading.
- In addition, leaders have secured an early years consultant to provide additional support.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved steadily since the last inspection. Leaders and the trust effectively support the new special needs coordinator (SENCo).

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Despite the improvements in teaching, resources and the professional development of staff, pupils' progress in reading over key stage 2 in 2016 remained below average.
- Improving pupils' progress in some subjects has been slower because of the time it has taken leaders to improve the standard of teaching of some individuals, the time it has taken to improve the leadership and management of some middle leaders and the difficulties in recruiting teachers and middle leaders of a suitable quality.

External support

The trust has provided effective support to the academy since the previous monitoring visit. The regional team, led by the regional education director, has provided effective support and challenge to leaders. The raising achievement board is an effective mechanism to support and challenge academy leaders to continue to raise the expectations of leaders and middle leaders for the quality of the teaching and the achievements of pupils. The raising achievement board, and the related tracking and pupil progress reviews, continue to help leaders and teachers to have a much sharper appreciation of their accountability for the standards achieved by pupils.