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Mr Darren Gelder
Executive Principal
Grace Academy Coventry
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Dear Mr Gelder

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grace Academy Coventry

Following my visit to your school on 6 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- fully embed the strategies that are now in place to improve the school
- ensure that the quality of teaching is of the highest standard throughout the school
- improve pupil progress so individual pupils and groups of pupils make rapid progress in all subjects in every year group
- further develop strategies to improve overall attendance so all pupils attend regularly.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the head of academy, two members of the academy improvement board (AIB), including the chair of the AIB, and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. School documentation, including improvement planning, self-evaluation and information about how school leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, was analysed. The minutes of meetings of the AIB and the systems to help to keep pupils safe were scrutinised, and information related to pupils' behaviour and attendance was considered. I also made short visits to art, English, mathematics and science lessons with you.

Context

The former principal left the school at the end of the last academic year. The executive principal, who was the principal of Grace Academy Solihull, now leads both schools. The former vice-principal of Grace Academy Coventry is now the head of academy. This senior leadership structure, along with a wider restructuring of leadership roles and responsibilities, has been in place since 1 September 2016.

Eighteen teachers have left the school and 14 new staff have joined Grace Academy Coventry since the last inspection. The science department is now fully staffed with specialist teachers. This was not the case at the time of the last inspection.

Main findings

School leaders and governors did not take effective action to quickly address the areas requiring improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. Consequently, the quality of teaching did not improve fast enough and pupils in all year groups and in a range of subjects made slow progress. The outcomes in last summer's external examinations were poor.

The action plan to address the areas for improvement was not robust enough, and leaders and staff were not held to close enough account for ensuring that rapid and sustained improvements took place. As a result, the pace of improvement evident at the time of the last inspection slowed.

After it became apparent that the school was not improving at the required pace, members of the AIB and trustees took decisive action to address this situation. They restructured the leadership team and appointed new staff, including the executive principal. The school is now beginning to improve and leaders realise that this must happen quickly in order to make up for lost ground. The school now has a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching to allow pupils of all abilities to make better progress. Teachers are using accurate information to plan work which offers stretch and challenge to pupils who have different starting points. For example,

staff are using what they know about disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to help them make more rapid progress than they did in the past. As assessment information is now being used more effectively, most lessons are building upon the skills pupils already have, more pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, and pupils are beginning to take greater responsibility for their work. However, developments are relatively new and improvements are not yet consistent or fully embedded.

Assessment information is now externally moderated and is used to provide leaders and managers with easily understood comparative information. This allows them to have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It is evident that leaders, governors and trustees know what the school's priorities are and what needs to be done to address them. There are also clear systems to hold leaders, at all levels, and staff to close account in order to ensure that improvements are made. However, these systems have only been put in place recently so they cannot be fully evaluated.

As a result of improved staffing, standards in science are beginning to improve. However, as changes came late in the school year and at the start of this academic year, they did not impact on last summer's GCSE outcomes. Achievement in science was poor in the summer of 2016. Pupils did not make enough progress in other subjects, including humanities and physical education. Disadvantaged pupils also made slower progress than other pupils in the school.

Achievement in the sixth form declined slightly in 2016, and pupils who were following level 2 provision, including GCSE English and mathematics, did not make enough progress. As a result, leaders have restructured the offer and improved the advice given, to ensure that pupils are following appropriate courses, either in the school or elsewhere.

There were some individual and subject successes in the 2016 outcomes which are now celebrated on the school website. Outcomes in English and art were the strongest in the school.

The executive principal, with the support of leaders, staff, the AIB and trustees, is beginning to change the culture of the school. He has accurately evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of provision and has established clear milestones to make rapid improvements. His understanding of where the school is now and what needs to be done underpins the '5 steps to good or better', which all staff can use to support rapid improvement.

Attendance is similar to that at the time of the last inspection. It is highest in Years 7 and 9, but too many pupils still do not attend regularly. As referenced in the '5 steps to good or better', 'students need to be here to learn.' The family support

worker makes home visits to support hard-to-reach families and the school is now employing a specialist attendance adviser to help them improve attendance. Leaders believe that this will have a positive impact on attendance, but it is too early to evaluate these developments.

Exclusions increased after the last inspection, but the frequency of fixed-term exclusions began to decline in the summer term of 2016. There have been very few exclusions this academic year and the behaviour seen during this inspection was positive and focused upon learning.

External support

The Grace Foundation has provided significant financial support to the school. For example, they have paid for a number of events to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and fundamental British values, and they have part-funded the assistant principal with the responsibility for ethos. They also pay the salary of the family support worker. The CEO is regularly in the school and attends meetings of the AIB. He has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, so he is able to provide appropriate support and challenge. The trust has also provided effective human resources, payroll, personnel and legal services to the school and brokered effective support from the SWAN Teaching School Alliance.

The school also receives practical support from Grace Academy Solihull, in the form of sharing good practice. Leaders value the support it receives from the Coventry secondary collaborative and the Ninestiles Academy Trust. Specific subject support is provided by the Institute of Physics for science, from the Lincolnshire Teaching School Alliance for English and mathematics and from Tuxford Academy for humanities. This support is relatively recent, so its impact cannot be fully evaluated.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector