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13 February 2018

Mr Phil Poulton  
Executive Headteacher  
The Hereford Academy  
Marlbrook Road  
Hereford  
HR2 7NG

Dear Mr Poulton

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Hereford Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 1 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because of pupils' weak progress in 2017.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- rapidly improve pupils' attendance so that their attendance reaches at least the national average
- continue to reduce pupils' persistent absence
- continue to reduce fixed-term exclusions so that fewer pupils miss their education.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with students, observed a pupil voice interview and work sample, met with the executive headteacher, head of school, other senior leaders, the trust's chief executive officer, and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated.

I scrutinised information about improvements to governance, the school's organisational structure, assessment and other systems.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has left the school. A new executive headteacher and head of school have been appointed from the trust. Leaders have undertaken a full review of all the school's systems and its organisational structure, and employed an education welfare officer and an attendance officer.

## **Main findings**

The school has had many years of turbulent senior leadership. The trust has restructured the leadership team. An executive headteacher from the trust is now the substantive headteacher of the school. He supports the school for three days each week. A capable head of school has been appointed who leads the school on a day-to-day basis. This structure has improved stability and increased senior leadership capacity.

In the five months that these new leaders have been in post, they have been extremely strategic in their approach. They began with a deep and detailed review of all of the information they have about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. They are honest about the challenges ahead and about the significant negative impact years of weak teaching have had, particularly on current Year 11.

This review revealed that as a result of weak tracking in the past, the school had not effectively addressed concerns around pupils' attendance and behaviour. The executive headteacher added these priorities to the action plan following the last inspection.

Acknowledging that this had not been done in the past, leaders have structured their line management systems around accountability for pupils' progress. They have produced a clear organisational structure so leaders know what and who they are responsible for. While these things are seemingly simple, the school has not benefited from these basic accountability systems before.

All leaders' new action plans are clear and concise. They focus squarely on what needs to improve.

Developments in the effectiveness of teaching are well underway, and are beginning to have a positive impact. As a result of a range of improvements to assessment, middle leaders now have a more secure picture of pupils' progress. Leaders have developed an effective assessment timetable and added two-hour meetings at key times of the year to review pupils' progress in departments. This has resulted in improved accuracy and confidence in assessments. Teachers are more able to pinpoint which pupils are behind, and why. Therefore they can support pupils more

effectively. As a result of strengthened training for teachers, their questioning is improving and pupils are benefiting.

In 2017, weak Year 11 outcomes meant that the school met the definition of a coasting school and fell below the floor standard, the minimum standard for pupils' progress. There were some small improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics. As a result of more focused mathematics teaching, and enabling pupils to better apply their mathematical knowledge, current Year 11 pupils are on track to improve on the progress made by Year 11 pupils in 2017. However, leaders acknowledge that they are still likely to make progress well below that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving for many. In September 2017, leaders introduced an online system to collect information on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. This shows that of over 10,000 logs, well over 90% are positive. However, leaders acknowledge that fixed-term exclusions for poor behaviour are still too high and need to reduce.

Pupils' attendance is below the national average. Their persistent absence is well above the national average, which is hampering pupils' progress. Leaders have a credible plan in place to deal with this and have employed a full-time education welfare and attendance officer. It is early in the implementation of this action plan, but persistent absence has begun to fall slightly overall. However, current Year 10 pupils' persistent absence remains a concern.

In 2017, post-16 students made weak progress. Leaders have recently begun to track these students' progress because this has not happened in the past. Their tracking shows improvements, but there is no convincing evidence that they will make significantly better progress in 2018. This is because the curriculum that the school offers does not meet their needs well. The school cannot offer a wide enough range of courses for its pupils as numbers fall. As a result of this, governors are proposing to shut the sixth form, with current students being allowed to complete their courses.

### **External support**

As a result of recent improved strategic leadership from the trust, their support is more effective than it has been in the past. They have assisted with revisions to the governing board and provided an executive headteacher. They have also sourced considerable funding for improvements in science. The chief executive officer of the trust chairs a half-termly raising achievement board, which effectively challenges leaders and supports governors.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Hereford, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**