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Mr Peter Gilbride
Interim Principal
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Dear Mr Gilbride

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Nuneaton Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 3 November 2022 on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in September 2021.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, the CEO, and the director of education of the multi-academy trust, other staff and the chair of the governing body the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also paid visits to lessons to see the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and spoke to pupils informally, as well as to a pupil group in a formal meeting. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

The Nuneaton Academy remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

The school is due to become part of the Tudor Grange Academy Trust from January 2023. There have been a number of changes to the senior leadership team in the school since the last inspection. The previous principal left at the end of the summer term, and you were appointed as interim principal from September 2022. The executive principal also

departed but has not been replaced. Both vice principals were promoted to their current roles in January 2022. One of the assistant principals was also appointed in January 2022. The coordinator for pupils with SEND, who is also a member of the senior leadership team, was appointed in April 2022. A new reading leader post was created in September 2022. The number of pupils on roll has grown rapidly from 689 in 2019 to 929 at the time of the inspection visit. The number and proportion of pupils on the SEND register has increased significantly.

The interim principal has ensured there is a sense of stability in the school ahead of the transition to a new trust. Leaders have taken effective steps to improve the curriculum provision, particularly in reading where they are enthusiastic champions. A significant minority of pupils in Year 7 joined the school in September 2022 with very poor reading skills. The school's strategy to improve reading has already started to have an impact on promoting a love of reading and increasing pupils' literacy skills. Form tutors now read to pupils regularly in tutor time. In lessons, there are 'drop everything and read' sessions based on the subject they are studying at the time. The way in which leaders have implemented a new commercial reading literacy scheme has motivated younger pupils in Years 7 and 8 to read more widely. Many are now reading with greater fluency. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the articles they can access through the scheme, such as one they had recently read on mental health. This article prompted a class discussion. The scheme has had less of an impact, so far, on the reading of older pupils.

In the subject departments identified by leaders where curriculum planning and sequencing is strongest, their practice has been shared more widely with other departments during professional development sessions. In English, for example, effective planning and adaptation of the curriculum for pupils with SEND are contributing to reducing the number of pupils removed from lessons. In English lesson visits during the inspection, there were no incidents of misbehaviour seen. Learning tasks set, such as short writing activities and teachers' targeted questioning of pupils, enabled all pupils, including those with SEND, to remain engaged in their learning. Pupils spoken to confirmed that the removal of pupils from lessons had reduced, not just as a consequence of better behaviour, but because activities are better planned to be accessible to pupils who struggle with their work.

Leaders recognise that pupils' progress from Years 7 to 11 is not yet good enough. There are signs from indicative GCSE results for 2022 of some gains in attainment.

Leaders place a high priority on staff well-being. The training programme has been well planned to develop teachers' skills and awareness of planning and sequencing the curriculum, the teaching of reading and meeting the needs of those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. By rearranging the timetable, leaders have given teachers a dedicated weekly time when they can plan together in their subject teams and participate in professional development. The Nuneaton Academy 'mantra' is 'know your pupils' in order to build strong relationships with them. Leaders have ensured that teachers are now more widely aware of the needs of their pupils through 'classroom charts' so that they can plan and adapt the learning accordingly.

The trust has enhanced the provision for SEND in the light of increasing needs. By including the role in the senior leadership team and placing an emphasis on staff training, leaders have acted strategically to enable teachers to be more confident in teaching pupils with SEND. Leaders monitor the impact of training closely. Teachers spoken to were highly positive of the support they receive from leaders for their own professional development.

Leaders have taken steps to improve uptake in GCSE modern foreign languages which had fallen to zero in Year 11 in 2019. They have now appointed three teachers of French in the department. They have also increased the number of GCSE options from three to four, enabling more pupils to opt to study a modern language. Uptake remains small and some pupils spoken to did not see the value of studying French.

Leaders have revised the school's policies to improve behaviour and attitudes. These changes were welcomed by pupils spoken to. They said that behaviour has improved and there are now more opportunities for their voice to be heard. By changing the way in which reported incidents are recorded and tracked, leaders can now more quickly identify trends and patterns. School data shows there has been a fall in reported bullying incidents. However, pupils said they would report an incident, confident that they would be listened to and respected by teachers. The proportion of bullying incidents involving SEND pupils is proportionally very small. There has been a significant reduction in the percentage of pupils removed from lessons due to poor behaviour or because they were struggling with their work, but the proportion who are disadvantaged remains high. Leaders recognise that there is more to do to improve attendance but are taking measures, such as the threat of fines, to tackle this.

With a new trust taking on the school next term, leaders of the current trust have been hampered taking longer-term strategic decisions. However, both trusts are working closely together to ensure a smooth transition. To ensure continuity, there will be no restructuring this academic year. Both the outgoing and new trust are providing effective support for leaders, particularly for you. Trust leaders and members of the governing body hold leaders to account through regular monitoring of steps taken on the school's action plan.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Midlands Academies Trust, the Department for Education regional director and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
His Majesty's Inspector