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18 January 2013

Gerard Rae  
Principal  
Stanground Academy  
Peterborough Road  
Peterborough  
PE7 3BY

Dear Mr Rae

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Stanground Academy**

Following my visit with Clive Kempton, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 16 and 17 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, students, a representative of the governing body and the leaders of the trust.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all students.

### **Context**

The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is average. An average proportion of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support the achievement of students who are entitled to free school meals, who are in local authority care or whose parents are in the armed forces). The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, who are supported through

school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, are all below average. An above-average proportion of students join the academy at times other than at the start of Year 7.

The academy came into existence in April 2012 following the closure of Stanground College. The academy is currently based in the college buildings but moves to a new building in September. The current Principal and three Assistant Principals joined the academy from outside the area but other senior leaders are from the former college. There has been relatively little change in staffing or in the make-up of the students attending the academy. Since September, Year 7 students are taught many lessons in a base separate from the rest of the academy. The academy is sponsored by the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. Although governors are appointed to the trust, local governors also meet regularly to review the work of the academy.

### **Achievement of pupils at the Academy**

When the academy opened in April 2012, students' attainment was low. For instance, the government's floor targets were not met in 2012, largely because students did not make sufficient progress, particularly in English. In a very short time, the academy has raised the attainment of students, particularly those that are in the middle of the ability range, largely through a very well-organised intervention programme. As a result, the current data suggests the academy is on course to significantly improve the proportion of students attaining five A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, in GCSE qualifications.

The academy inherited a situation in which large gaps existed between the achievement of a number of groups. The achievement of boys has been well below that of the girls, particularly in reading and writing. This gap has closed significantly over the last two terms because the academy is ensuring that its teaching is better suited to the needs of boys. The gap that existed for students eligible for pupil premium is reducing because these students are benefiting most from improvements to the programme of interventions put in place to help students who are not achieving as they should.

When the academy opened, disabled students and those who have special educational needs were making less progress than other groups. A contributory factor in this was that many of these students were involved in alternative education that did not enable them to achieve enough in mathematics and English. However, in a very short time, effective steps have been taken to improve the progress these students make. The monitoring of students involved in alternative education has been improved and the academy has assumed greater responsibility for the development of their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Steps have been taken to ensure students' special educational needs are more accurately identified so more appropriate interventions can be used. For instance, a reading programme, focused on enhancing students' comprehension, has substantially lifted the reading

ages of students with reading difficulties in Year 8. Plans to implement an academy-wide programme aimed at promoting reading generally are also well advanced.

Students are making better progress because the academy has improved students' attitudes to learning. In all lessons seen, students showed an interest in learning and often responded enthusiastically when teaching was effective. The better organisation of classes to reflect the assessment of students' learning is also improving students' progress. For instance, in mathematics and English, students in danger of not achieving a C grade are taught in very small groups with additional support from a learning mentor. This is improving the progress made by middle and lower ability students. However, the lack of challenge in too much teaching hinders students' progress in lessons, particularly for higher-attaining students. Inspectors saw some noteworthy exceptions, for instance in history, and higher-attaining students indicated that they felt they were regularly challenged in mathematics. Good and outstanding progress was observed in quite a wide range of subjects. However, improved progress was less evident in the key subjects of science, mathematics and, especially, English.

In the sixth form, predicted numbers for next year are higher because students recognise that important improvements have been made to the sixth form. There are improvements in retention and students are making better progress because they are more likely to be on the right course.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Not enough is yet good or better. This is because the academy has focused successfully on improving students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. The big drive to improve teaching quality has recently accelerated but it is a little early to fully judge its impact. Students' improved behaviour has already created a better environment for learning and no disruptive behaviour was noted in any of the lessons.

In the best lessons observed, such as history in Key Stage 4 and philosophy in the sixth form, teachers challenge students and question them rigorously to justify their answers and give extended responses. Lessons are taught at a brisk pace, students make tangible gains in learning and it is clear that they enjoy the lessons and the relationships with the teacher. Work is regularly marked and students are challenged to extend their homework tasks or further explain any misconceptions.

The reverse is true in the less successful lessons, for example in English, mathematics and science. Here, learning objectives in teachers' plans are too vague, the teacher talks too much and directs a series of activities. The pace of learning is slow, in part because all students undertake the same work at an identical pace. Sometimes, teachers' questioning is not sufficiently probing and strategies are not used to ensure that all students have to consider key ideas. Learning is not reviewed

regularly enough throughout or at the end of the lessons to check what the students have learned.

Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are more effectively taught because they are receiving better support from teaching assistants and learning mentors. Instrumental in this is the inclusion in the new performance management arrangements of more precise targets for students' progress.

Students spoke positively about the improvements that have been made to the assemblies they experience. These are enhancing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For instance, assemblies are used well to reinforce the importance of attending school every day.

Senior staff are aware of the current issues in teaching and are determined to improve its quality. They will be held to account by the sponsor trust this term to ensure more teaching becomes good or better. Senior staff have already introduced a revised template for lesson planning which is now used consistently by all staff. Students confirm that behaviour in lessons is better and that the best lessons use a wide range of stimulating resources and provide opportunities for them to work in pairs and small groups that helps them to consolidate their learning.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students were observed to be well behaved and considerate around the academy. Students were united in their view that behaviour has improved greatly since the academy opened. One student captured the views of many in stating, 'Senior leaders in the academy have ensured everyone is clear about what is expected so the academy is a much calmer place now.' Almost all students respond well to the academy's clear expectations about behaviour. For the very small minority of students that find it difficult to meet these expectations in lessons, effective arrangements have been made to ensure that there is less need for exclusions. This includes more effective strategies to ensure that these students fully understand the academy's expectations and can quickly be included in lessons.

Students also indicated that incidents of bullying are rare and that they are resolved well by staff. Students reported that they thought that senior leaders were particularly approachable. The Year 7 base has helped younger pupils feel safe and has drastically reduced reports from younger students of concerns about bullying. Students have a good awareness of different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and that associated with homophobia.

Effective steps are being taken to improve the monitoring of all aspects of behaviour, including the ability to analyse the behaviour of different groups. Since the academy opened, the attendance of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and those eligible for pupil premium, has improved. Students were observed to be adopting safe practices in lessons and generally

around the academy. Punctuality to lessons has improved significantly because all staff meet and greet students in the corridors prior to the start of lessons.

Students in the sixth form spoke very positively about the improvements to this phase since the academy opened. In particular, they appreciate the access they have to a wide range of advice and guidance bespoke to this age group.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the Academy**

In addition to the impressive improvements made to all aspects of behaviour, the academy's leaders have very quickly made changes to the curriculum in both the main academy and the sixth form. For instance, students in Year 10 are experiencing a more appropriate science curriculum and the more able are undertaking a better balance of courses that includes more that are academic. There are clearer pathways between the courses offered in the main academy and those available post-16. Important improvements have been made that allow leaders to monitor all the outcomes for different groups much more effectively. This is enhancing the academy's ability to ensure equal opportunities, as reflected in the reduction in the large achievement gaps that previously existed. This is ample evidence that the academy has the capacity to drive the further improvements that are needed.

The governance arrangements have been enhanced. The local governors are far more focused on monitoring the outcomes for students because the foundation has ensured that all aspects of administration are very efficiently managed. Overall governance is boosted by the arrangements that ensure senior leaders are effectively held to account through governors associated with the trust. However, new local governors do not have sufficient access to training that is independent of senior leaders. The senior leadership team has considerable capacity because it is a relatively large group and there is access to expertise from across the trust. Staff and students are strongly supportive of the new Principal because he is very approachable and has successfully brought about improvements in key areas.

Senior leaders have an astute awareness of the academy's strengths and weaknesses including a very accurate view of the quality of teaching. During the inspection, almost every lesson observation was undertaken jointly with leaders. Senior leaders quickly and confidently identified the strengths and weakness in lessons and, crucially, were able to identify the staff development that would ensure improvement. However, many middle leaders were much less secure in being able to link students' outcomes to the strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

The leadership of the sixth form is effective. Robust monitoring arrangements are in place and a plan outlines the next developments aimed at improving this provision further.

Senior leaders have communicated a clear aspirational vision for the future and have captured this in the academy's long-term plans. However, shorter term improvement plans are less well developed. They do not always have quantifiable

targets based on the shorter term outcomes for students' attainment that can be used to hold leaders to account. Planning does not give enough attention to those eligible for support through pupil premium funding. Key areas of underperformance have been challenged and the academy is implementing an approach to performance management that stresses students' progress. The academy is developing a comprehensive programme of professional development to tackle the remaining weaknesses in teaching. Crucially, leaders have acknowledged the need for greater urgency in implementing the plans to improve teaching through more detailed short-term planning.

### **External support**

The academy has received excellent support from the trust. This has allowed the academy to deal effectively with key aspects of underperformance that could have seriously slowed the rate of improvement. This support has been central to the improvements made to the curriculum and to ensuring equal opportunities through the enhanced provision for all the groups that until recently were making significantly less progress. The trust has noticeably improved governance through the more effective longer term arrangements for holding senior leaders to account.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Accelerate the improvements being made to teaching, particularly in English, mathematics and science, so that all groups of students make good progress in lessons.
- Enhance short-term planning so all leaders are held to account for the improvements being made, particularly to teaching.
- Ensure that all plans fully address the need to improve the outcomes for students eligible for pupil premium.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**