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27 January 2014

Mr S Sissons  
Headteacher  
The Dorcan Academy  
St Paul's Drive  
Covingham  
Swindon  
SN3 5DA

Dear Mr Sissons

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

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. There were also a number of short visits to lessons. The academy improvement plan was evaluated.

### **Context**

There have been no staffing changes at senior level since your recent inspection. Some teaching posts are being covered by temporary staff and you are currently looking to recruit permanent staff to these positions.

## **Main findings**

You have made a very good start in addressing the areas for improvement identified at your recent inspection. The main focus is, rightly, on continuing to develop the quality of teaching at the academy. Expectations on what students are able to achieve have been raised significantly and there is a clear focus on ensuring leaders with responsibilities for subjects, heads of faculty, take responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning within their departments.

There is a renewed focus on strengthening the quality of planning and marking. Expectations are that teachers' planning takes account of students' prior learning to ensure that new learning is enabling them to make good and better progress. Regular, in lesson assessment opportunities are planned to ensure that learning outcomes are being met by all students. Heads of faculty prepare a report every six weeks on the quality of planning and marking in their departments. The senior leader with responsibility for the quality of teaching samples department plans and books to ensure the accuracy and consistency of these reports. Senior leaders refer to these reports when conducting short visits to departments to monitor the quality of planning and work in books and to ensure any identified areas for improvement within departments are being implemented.

Some teachers are accessing support from an external consultant to develop their teaching from good to outstanding. These teachers are also being used to work alongside colleagues whose teaching is deemed to be requiring improvement. There are regularly opportunities for these members of staff to share best practice, to observe other teachers and to attend regular professional development sessions. These initiatives are now well established and there is evidence of improvements in the quality of teaching for these members of staff.

There are raised expectations on students taking more responsibility for their learning. An effort grade has been implemented and is reported on every three weeks. Students are aware that this grade relates to them being actively involved in ensuring they are making the best progress they can. Mentors have been recruited from local businesses to work alongside students to offer help, guidance and support. There are a wide range of extra sessions on offer to support students outside of lesson times and, encouragingly, the vast majority of students are taking advantage of these. During my short visits to lessons, students exhibited very positive attitudes and spoke confidently about what they are learning.

The academy development plan identifies key areas for improvement. It sets appropriately challenging targets and includes regular milestones to check on the progress of these targets. The process for collecting student progress data is comprehensive. This is used effectively to ensure any students at risk of underachievement are identified quickly and extra support is put in place. Members of the governing body use this data to monitor the school's progress towards

meeting its targets and they offer a suitable mix of challenge and support to senior leaders. Your current predictions indicate that the progress students are making is beginning to accelerate.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The school is accessing highly effective external support from a range of providers including an outstanding school, an academy federation and external consultants. There are also links between departments and other schools. The main areas for this support are targeted at improving the quality of teaching and leadership at all levels.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Swindon and the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**