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15 December 2015

Mr Gary Evans  
Halewood Academy  
The Avenue  
Halewood  
Knowsley  
Merseyside  
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Dear Mr Evans,

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Halewood Academy**

Following my visit with Janet Peckett and David Woodhouse, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 2 and 3 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley local authority and as below.

Yours sincerely

**Joan Bonenfant**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2015:**

- Swiftly improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good in order to raise the achievement of all groups of students, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in English and mathematics, by making sure that:
  - there are high expectations of what students can achieve, including the quantity, quality, care and presentation of students' work
  - students' attitudes to learning are consistently good
  - all staff, including those in the sixth form, regularly and accurately assess students' achievements so they set challenging work that matches the needs and abilities of all groups of students, particularly for disadvantaged students and boys
  - students' literacy and numeracy skills are developed effectively across all subjects
  - all teachers follow the academy's agreed policies and procedures for marking students' work and that clear guidance is given to students on how they can improve their work
  - students in the sixth form make good or better progress in vocational subjects.
  
- Rapidly improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by ensuring that:
  - there is clear senior leadership responsibility for the leadership of teaching and a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching so that any inadequate practice is swiftly eradicated
  - accurate systems are established for assessing students' achievement to ensure that leaders can confidently check and measure how well their actions improve students' outcomes, including in the sixth form
  - heads of department, including those new to post, are rigorously held to account for checking and improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their areas of responsibility
  - the pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students so that the gaps between their achievement with that of others close quickly
  - governors hold leaders rigorously to account for improving students' achievement and the quality of teaching
  - the findings of the recent review of governance are quickly and fully implemented.
  
- Continue to implement current strategies to improve attendance, particularly in Year 11, so that it is at least in line the national average.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work and had meetings with you the Principal, the vice-principal, members of the governing body and the executive monitoring board, staff, pupils and representatives of the Wade Deacon Academy Trust, including the lead Principal. Inspectors visited a number of lessons, observed an assembly and the behaviour of pupils at break and lunchtime. We scrutinised a large sample of pupils' work and examined a wide range of documentation, including the academy's self-evaluation of its work and the development plan. Inspectors also evaluated the effectiveness of the academy's arrangements to safeguard pupils.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring visit there have been several changes to staffing, largely as a result of senior leaders challenging underperformance. The former head of the mathematics department has resigned, as has the senior member of staff leading on the pupil premium. The pupil premium is additional government funding designed to support the educational achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority. A new leader of the sixth form has been appointed. The head of design technology has resigned, and there is now an acting head of this department. The former acting head of science has left the school and a new leader of this subject is in post. There have been changes to staffing in humanities, including the appointment of a new head of the history department. There have been a number of further appointments, including an assessment co-ordinator in science and a leader with responsibility for literacy transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

All the indicators point to an improvement in outcomes for pupils, but the academy's leaders are well aware that there is still much work to be done. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, rose in 2015, but results were nevertheless disappointing, largely because pupils underachieved in mathematics, geography and history.

Learners in the sixth form make reasonable progress. In 2015 a greater proportion of learners were successful in their A and AS level examinations than in 2014. Learners who took examinations in vocational subjects also fared better than in previous years; attainment was particularly strong in business studies and sports studies as all learners taking these examinations achieved a distinction star.

According to information provided by the school during the inspection, a greater proportion of pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 and learners in the sixth form are on target to achieve good grades in their public examinations than was the case at

this time last year. The academy now takes a much more robust approach to ensuring the accuracy of information relating to pupils' and learners' current progress; therefore, this is a further indication that there are some green shoots of improvement evident in outcomes for pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4, and for learners in Key Stage 5.

From evidence gathered during the inspection, there has been less improvement in Key Stage 3. Pupils do not always make good progress in this key stage, particularly in mathematics, but also in other subjects, including English to some extent. The work set is sometimes too easy and frequently represents a repetition of work done in primary school. Furthermore, at present the academy does not gather information on the progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 sufficiently frequently; as a result, pupils are at risk of falling well behind their classmates before teachers step in to sort this out.

The progress of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs continues to improve. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is, however, more mixed; their progress in English is catching up quickly with that of other pupils, both in the school and nationally. This is because this subject is taught well, particularly in Key Stage 4. However, this is not the case in mathematics; all pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, make unacceptably poor progress in this subject, across the school.

The academy has invested in a reading programme to support the development of pupils' literacy skills, and there are some early signs that this is having a beneficial impact. However, academy leaders have not yet succeeded in encouraging all pupils to develop a love of reading and the well-stocked library remains, sadly, an under-used resource.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teachers have made a concerted and sustained effort to insist on higher standards of how pupils present their work; as a result, there has been a substantial improvement in this regard. The vast majority of staff follow the school's policy on marking to the letter. From inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books, it is apparent that this rigorous approach is effective, for the most part, in helping pupils to improve their work. However, this is not the case in mathematics, where marking is often of poor quality.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection stated categorically that, in the large majority of lessons, the work they are doing is more challenging than before the previous inspection. They said that they appreciate the fact that teachers now give them the opportunity in lessons to set themselves a challenge and do more demanding work.

The vice-principal is relentless in her drive to improve teaching; she has already had a marked impact on improving the overall quality of teaching. Teachers are grouped in 'triads' where a high-performing member of staff is linked with other teachers, so

that good practice can be shared. Academy leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching are now much more accurate. This is because they are founded on a wider evidence base than in the past, which includes not only lesson observations but also information on progress and pupils' perceptions of how well they are being taught. Evidence gathered on inspection supports academy leaders' contention that, despite substantial staff training and some improvement, there remains too much variability in the quality of teaching, especially in Key Stage 3.

Academy leaders have a very good grasp of which groups of pupils have underachieved and have introduced some initiatives designed to improve the teaching of such groups. For example, in history, teachers decided it would be a good idea to model how to plan extended written answers to questions; evidence suggests this has helped pupils of middle ability make better progress.

The impact of teaching assistants is too variable. Teaching assistants do not always plan with teachers how they can contribute effectively to pupils' learning; as a result, their work sometimes lacks focus. Academy leaders do not routinely set performance management targets for teaching assistants. This is a missed opportunity to hold these members of staff more effectively to account for pupils' progress.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Attitudes to learning in lessons remain inconsistent. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and learners in the sixth form demonstrate better behaviour and greater engagement in their learning than lower down the school.

Teachers' management of poor behaviour is for the most part effective but sometimes low-level disruption distracts from the essential purpose of the lesson. For example, in one Year 7 modern foreign languages lesson, observed during the visit, the teacher showed tremendous tenacity and refused to be deflected from what she wanted to teach; nevertheless the behaviour of one or two boys was very trying and some lesson time was lost in sorting it out.

Behaviour around the academy at break and lunchtimes is good. Pupils generally are pleasant and polite to each other, their teachers and visitors to the academy. They said they now take much more pride in their work and in their uniform. During the monitoring visit, pupils' appearance was indeed impeccable and most pupils seemed to arrive at school with their equipment, on time and prepared to learn.

Attendance is improving and the rate of persistent absence has reduced, but it is still too high. The measures the academy takes to follow up absence swiftly have been strengthened. The academy is showing greater determination in ensuring that parents understand their responsibilities with respect to attendance.

The introduction of the 'inclusion school', where pupils are withdrawn from class but have to remain in the academy and do work, has served as a more effective deterrent to poor behaviour than previous sanctions. This has been instrumental in reducing the overall rate of fixed-term exclusion.

Procedures to ensure the safeguarding of pupils and learners are effective. Pupils and learners spoken to during the visit said that bullying is rare and that when it occurs it is dealt with swiftly. The use of derogatory language of any description is frowned upon and incidents of a racist nature are uncommon.

The academy demonstrated a strong sense of social responsibility in setting up discussions in lessons about the dangers of extremist behaviour following the recent atrocities in Paris. Some pupils spoken to during the monitoring visit were able to express their ideas with sensitivity and a good grasp of the complexity of such issues. In this way, academy leaders help pupils and learners to develop their understanding of the wider world.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Academy leaders have successfully established a culture of accountability that is non-negotiable. Across the academy, there is a shared sense of responsibility and a discernible desire for further improvement. As a result, the tide is turning and the long legacy of underachievement is gradually being eroded.

The executive monitoring board of the governing body is exemplary in its unremitting challenge to the academy to 'do better and quickly!' Governors have been unflinching in their resolve to secure rapid improvement. They have been a defining factor in moving the academy forward.

Senior leaders have been relentless in challenging underperformance. As a result, weak leadership of mathematics and design technology has been tackled and the academy is now in a position to appoint new staff to these positions.

Performance management procedures for teachers have been improved. All teachers now have targets that ensure that they concentrate on improving the progress of all their pupils, not just the ones about to take public examinations. Teachers spoken to during the monitoring visit saw this change as wholly beneficial: they see it as more likely to improve the quality of teaching across all year groups and feel that, in the future, they will therefore be less dependent on short-term solutions, such as intensive intervention, because they are 'growing better learners through better teaching'.

Passionate and enthusiastic leadership of English is 'blazing a trail' in transforming the school and helping other subjects to improve. Equally, promising leadership of

science has had a galvanising effect on this department, leading to demonstrable improvement in outcomes for pupils and learners.

The review of the use of the pupil premium was conducted by Wade Deacon High School, an outstanding school that has been praised for its good practice in the use of this funding. The review was trenchant in its criticism of the leadership of this area of the academy's work. Academy leaders took decisive action and challenged this member of staff. Improvement was not forthcoming and the member of staff has left the school. This has left a vacuum at leadership level and, to date, little effective action has been taken to progress the excellent development plan that was generated from the recent review.

Pupils and learners are now set much more challenging targets that are helping to raise expectations. Procedures to check up on pupils' progress in Key Stage 4 and that of learners in Key Stage 5 are rigorous and frequent. This is not the case in Key Stage 3. As a result, the underperformance of some pupils goes unchecked for too long.

Academy leaders have altered the curriculum so that a greater proportion of pupils follow courses in a suite of academic subjects; this is indicative of the ethos of aspiration that is becoming embedded across the academy. The curriculum is in the process of further adaptation to meet the increasing challenge subsumed within the new GCSE examinations. However, the curriculum at Key Stage 3 remains insufficiently demanding and does not build effectively on what pupils have already learned in primary school.

Academy leaders' self-evaluation of their work is accurate and the development plan is a well-designed tool for future improvement. There is a frank acknowledgement that complacency is not an option and there is still a long way to go in turning the academy around. Nevertheless, the encouraging early signs of progress are testament to achievements so far and demonstrate that academy leaders have strong capacity for further improvement.

### **External support**

The principal strategic partner is Wade Deacon Academy Trust. This has provided high-quality support and challenge to the academy, particularly in relation to the expenditure of the pupil premium and also to improve attendance. The trust has a track record of improving provision elsewhere and has brought its experience in so doing very fruitfully to bear in moving the academy forward. Leaders of the trust recognise the existing strengths of current leaders of Halewood Academy and have been extremely helpful in developing their capacity to lead the academy more effectively.

**Priorities for further improvement are as follows:**

- Urgently establish strong leadership of pupil premium expenditure so that recommendations from the recent review can be followed up rapidly and thereby have a positive impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Review schemes of work in Key Stage 3 and increase the level of challenge in all subjects to build more effectively on work covered in primary school.
- Rapidly tackle remaining inadequate teaching in mathematics and the residual effects of former weak leadership of this subject.
- Improve outcomes in humanities.
- Increase the frequency of assessment in Key Stage 3 so that teachers have the information they need to check up on pupils' progress and ensure that staff quickly step in if pupils have fallen behind.
- Introduce procedures for the performance management of support staff so that they are held to account more effectively for pupils' progress.