

Serco Inspections
Boundary House
2 Wythall Green Way
Middle Lane
BIRMINGHAM
West Midlands
B47 6LW

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 2843
beverley.joyner@serco.com



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Miss Esther Holland
Associate Headteacher
St Marks Church of England Academy
Acacia Road
Mitcham
CR4 1SF

Dear Miss Holland

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 30 March 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to those who met with me at such short notice and in particular, the Chair and other governor, the school improvement partner and members of the senior leadership team. I am also very grateful to the students who were able to talk to me about the improvements being made in the academy and for the time that staff gave during my discussions with them.

A new senior leadership team was formed in September 2009 with a focus on raising attainment and resolving the issues from the last inspection. A new lead sponsor is now in place, although the Diocese of Southwark still has a key role. Major building work is underway and space in the academy is restricted by the alterations being made.

As a result of the inspection on 25–26 June 2008, the academy was asked to

- accelerate all students' progress by increasing the proportion of good or better teaching
- ensure effective leadership and management of the sixth form in order to raise standards and improve the quality of provision, particularly the guidance and support that students receive
- ensure that, by the first day of the autumn term 2009, the governing body has reviewed and updated all its relevant policies and procedures and has arrangements in place to review their effectiveness.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.



The associate headteacher provides considerable drive and determination to raise standards. Strategic planning is very well thought out, underpins all that the academy does and is based on the lead sponsor's improved statement of action. The actions required to improve sixth form provision are well thought out. Planning is now an effective tool to drive forward improvement because it is well monitored and the impact of actions are regularly evaluated. Supported by members of a senior leadership team who bring considerable expertise to the academy's work, the associate headteacher has been tenacious in her pursuit of better learning and progress. In addition, effective help provided by the lead sponsor and school improvement partner has strengthened the capacity of the academy's leadership and is increasing the pace of improvement. Senior leaders' passion for students to do their best is paying off. Staff approach their work in a constructively self-critical way. The focus on improved student progress has led to more precise support for students, especially for those with weaknesses in literacy and for those with learning difficulties.

At the heart of this improvement is a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, well targeted support for staff and a strong focus on the use of assessment to improve learning. As a result, lesson planning is better focused on outcomes to be achieved by different students and groups. Both teaching and students' progress in the lessons seen were at least satisfactory and sometimes good. The academy is well on the way to its target of 60% good or better teaching by the end of the current school year although it is currently slightly less than this percentage. Senior staff acknowledge that the assessment of students' learning is not used consistently across all lessons. In addition, there are missed opportunities for students to work together, to self-assess and to demonstrate their learning to others. The academy's comprehensive system for tracking students' progress and tests and examination results since September 2009 provide good information which staff are now making better use of in lessons. The data shows that the academy is well on track to exceed the government's lowest attainment target for secondary schools and also to exceed its own more challenging targets.

Students' attitudes to learning have improved. They are generally positive and most students concentrate well. Behaviour is satisfactory and the academy's reward system is valued by students. The new inclusion facility is well organised and planned. The number of external exclusions has been significantly reduced since last year. Around the academy, behaviour is satisfactory but is not helped by the reduction in space as a result of construction work and occasionally students are slow getting to lessons. Attendance has improved and figures are now at the national average; the academy has exceeded the target it set itself. Although staff are working hard to tackle persistent absences these remain too high.

Much work has been undertaken to provide a relevant curriculum for the sixth form and tailoring courses more precisely. Decisive leadership is helping to restore students' and parents' confidence in the provision and a range of external providers



are now used to teach practical courses. Although numbers transferring to Year 12 dropped in September 2009, personal support provided is now helping students choose the most appropriate pathways; this is so they can make better progress in relation to their interests and capability. As a result, there has been an increase in applications for places for September 2010.

Governors rigorously monitor the academy's work. They ensure that all policies are ratified and have a programme of continuous review in place.

The academy's specialisms of science and performing arts are now well represented in the academy's curriculum. GCSE results in art and music are above national averages and strong for some of the sciences. Strategic planning for the development of the specialisms, including providing improved continuity through the sixth form, is good.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

George Derby
Additional Inspector



Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - chair of governors/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – except for academies
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.schools@dcyf.gov.uk)
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools