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27 February 2009

Sir Mark Grundy  
The Executive Principal  
George Salter Collegiate Academy  
Claypit Lane  
West Bromwich  
B70 9UW

Dear Sir Mark

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to George Salter Collegiate Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with Nada Trikic HMI to your academy on 10 and 11 February 2009 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring visit in connection with the academies initiative.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the executive principal, principal, two vice principals, a senior assistant principal, the extended school's officer, five assistant principals, heads of subject departments, groups of pupils and two governors.

## Context

George Salter Collegiate Academy opened in September 2007 along with the partner Shireland Academy. The academy had existed previously as George Salter High School. Each academy has a principal and two vice principals who, together with the executive principal and other key managers, form the executive leadership team. A director of finance has responsibility for both academies. The collegiate academy trust board, which has as a member the principal of George Salter, meets termly and is the decision making body for the two academies. Each academy also has its own local governing body. The academy has specialisms in the arts and sports.

The academy serves a community of significant economic and social deprivation. There are just fewer than 900 students who attend the academy. Approximately 50% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 40% of students' first language is not English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 32% which



is well above the national average. Just over a quarter of students have been identified as having learning difficulties which is above the national average, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is below average.

There had been a significant staff turnover leading up to the opening of the academy but since the opening in September 2007 there has been stability in staffing.

### Achievement and standards

There has been a rise in standards brought about by improving the progress made by students. There is also a determination to raise standards further as reflected in targets which, based on the prior attainment of students, are challenging. Given the attainment on entry to the academy, students make outstanding progress. Progress in English and mathematics is good. Study support and academic coaches contribute positively to students' progress through targeted programmes of intervention. A recent initiative has targeted Year 11 students with English as an additional language resulting in a personalised learning programme tailored to remedy weaker language skills identified through diagnostic assessment. Students are responding positively to a range of challenges and activities to improve their language and communications skills.

Although the notable progress students make is improving standards, there is still, in some subject areas, a significant gap between standards attained by George Salter students and the national average. Students enter the academy with exceptionally low standards of attainment, although these have begun to rise in the last two years. By the end of Year 11, GCSE results for 2008 indicate that 89% of students achieved five or more high grade passes, well above average. Above average standards in science and information and communication technology (ICT) make a significant contribution to overall standards. In contrast, standards attained in English and mathematics are well below the national average. The proportion of students achieving five GCSE A\* to C passes including English and mathematics is 34%, well below average, although continuing the upward trend established in the predecessor school. The benchmark of five GCSE A\* to C passes was reached by 25% of boys and 44% of girls. The performance of Pakistani students on this indicator was well below the school average. The proportion of students attaining five or more A\* to G grades exceeds the national average, reflecting the inclusive nature of the curriculum.

Standards in Key Stage 3 are below average, but rising. An increasing proportion of students attain Level 5 or more in national tests as reflected in the academy results for 2008. The proportion reaching Level 6 exceeds the challenging target set. This represents good progress. Steps have been taken to boost standards on entry through a designated programme focusing on key skills in the context of a nurturing and supportive learning environment.

Assessment and tracking systems have been strengthened to provide a regular analysis of progress for different groups of learners. Training is in place to ensure that subject leaders and teachers are able to make full use of this information to inform teaching and learning, and appropriate intervention.

### Personal development and well-being

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good and often outstanding and the students responded positively to the support and care they receive. The students who have been at George Salter for some time talk about the huge improvements in behaviour which has meant they now have opportunities to learn in calm and purposeful lessons. Observations of lessons confirmed this. Behaviour observed around school was also good, and often outstanding, and students were polite and respectful towards each other and staff. During the monitoring visit, students' behaviour was impeccable when responding to a fire alarm.

Students report that they feel safe. They are very aware of the support structures in place and are confident that they can access staff and specialist help if they need support. Likewise, students are confident that any instances of bullying or racism are dealt with, but explain that they feel there is very little of this behaviour. The extensive range of extra-curricular clubs on offer is very much appreciated by students. They appreciate how the academy is encouraging healthy lifestyles through sports clubs and the healthy options at lunch.

The centre of inclusion is providing innovative ways to engage disaffected and/or low ability students. There are very good systems in place to provide support and guidance for students, to which they respond positively.

There are a small number of students who are persistently absent. The academy is trying to do as much as possible to support these students including working in partnership with other agencies. Numbers of persistent absentees have gone down and attendance is improving. Academy staff are collating attendance data and analysing trends in order to inform further action. Data collected clearly highlights the negative impact of low attendance on examination success.

### Quality of provision

Most of the teaching observed during the visit was satisfactory or good. This agreed with the judgments of the senior leadership team through joint observations. Strengths in lessons were excellent relationships between teachers and students and positive attitudes to learning. High levels of cooperative learning were observed and active engagement in learning tasks. Students were well organised and displayed a mature approach to study and improvement.

In some lessons opportunities were missed to maximise student participation and to enhance communication skills. In the best lessons teachers had created activities that engaged students in discussions or activities that helped them develop

confidence in their communications skills and build up skills that accelerated their learning. This was not a regular feature in lessons visited. In many of the lessons observed teachers did not regularly monitor the students' learning in order to adjust the pace of teacher input or the learning activities to ensure students consolidated or extended their learning. The quality of marking is developing, although this varies across subjects. Where most helpful, teachers' marking highlights what students need to do to improve and informs the student of how well they are progressing towards their standards.

The academy continues to refine the curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 to extend flexibility and choice to meet the needs and interests of students. As a response to weak language skills, the curriculum in Year 7 has been modified for a targeted group of learners. This enables students to work with a small group of staff to improve literacy skills and to meet social and emotional needs. Observation of one group demonstrated high expectation and excellent relationships. Students are confident and enjoy tasks which are planned carefully to develop their skills. Year 9 students are supported in their selection of subjects from the performing arts, humanities and technology, and have the opportunity to commence accredited courses. In Key Stage 4 the range of courses available continues to expand and contributes positively to the achievement of students. All students follow vocational courses bringing relevance to the curriculum. An alternative curriculum programme is available for vulnerable students to promote key skills and work related learning opportunities. Leaders continue to review the curriculum to ensure that courses support progression routes at 16.

### Leadership and management

The executive leadership team, led by the executive principal, effectively provides the strategic decision making which drives improvement. The collegiate academy trust board has identified challenging over-arching priorities for the collegiate which inform the key priorities for George Salter Academy. One of the key priorities for George Salter is to raise the percentage of students who achieve five GCSE A\* to C passes including English and mathematics, which is rightly seen as fundamental in improving standards.

The academy is very effectively led by the senior leadership team of the principal, the two vice principals and the four assistant principles. The principal has successfully created a positive 'can do' attitude amongst staff resulting in a shared determination to make the academy a success. The principal's enthusiasm and passion for improving the students' experience of the academy is infectious. Improvement work is linked to core priorities and expectations of what should be done are set out in a weekly format which ensures a high level of rigour and relentless attitude to raising standards. There are very good systems in place for senior team leaders to meet. Through these meetings each one is held to account against a set of objectives that again highlight robustness in delivering high quality leadership and management.

Much of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are undertaken by external consultants, often with senior staff working alongside. Although this has given academy staff opportunities to input into evaluations made, it has meant that some leaders, for example heads of department, have not been given enough responsibility to monitor teaching and learning. This has led to a restriction of in-house development of skills in monitoring in some subject areas and has meant that articulating what is good and outstanding teaching has not been fully discussed so that all teachers clearly know what it looks like.

The senior leadership team and heads of department are much more involved in monitoring and evaluating student achievement, students' work and their views and teachers' planning. There is a robust calendar for this work which involves subject departments identifying areas for improvement, implementing action, and reviewing impact. The very effective leadership structure ensures that the four assistant principals, also known as zone directors, keep a check on the work of the heads of department as well as providing a steer to ongoing work.

Governance works effectively at two levels. The collegiate academy trust board involves governors working at developing the strategic direction of both academies, while the local governing body is developing its role to ensure the academy is achieving its key priorities. There have only been three local governing body meetings since the academy was opened and roles are still being established. Although systems have been set up for governors to receive information, there is nothing in place to coordinate opportunities for them observe what happens in lessons or link governors to specific departments.

There is a range of systems in place to monitor provision for self-evaluation purposes. The academy has been robust in the judgements it has made, for example recognising that the amount of progress students make is often outstanding but that standards in core English and mathematics remain satisfactory. The academy has an impressive track record in improving students' behaviour and attitudes as well as the amount of progress students make. Standards, that were exceptionally low, are on their way up but remain the greatest challenge for the academy in ensuring all pupils gain the qualifications that will secure their future opportunities.

All safeguarding procedures are in place and all requirements met.

### External support

Work with the partner academy in the collegiate provides good opportunities to share practice. The academy uses the support of a number of external consultants in the monitoring of teaching and learning which has brought about useful evaluations of provision to inform future planning. The School Improvement Partner provides helpful support. He has identified the need to continue to raise standards in English and mathematics, recognising the evidence of improving standards in mathematics this year with over 40% students in Year 11 having already achieved a GCSE A\* to C pass. The academy benefits from the links with the Specialist Schools and Academies

Trust which has led to the sharing of good practice, the use of consultancy expertise, and adults other than teachers to enrich the curriculum. For example through visits from a glass artist, the students have worked with the artist to create an impressive and thought provoking sculpture.

### Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning so that all teaching is consistently very effective and more lessons are judged to be outstanding.
- Improve student performance in all subjects, but particularly in the core subjects, increasing the proportion of students achieving five GCSE \*A to C passes including English and mathematics.
- Further develop the capacity of the senior leadership team and middle managers to create consistency in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning.
- Extend the role of the collegiate academy trust board and local governing body to ensure they have greater participation in monitoring the quality of provision.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the DCSF. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook  
Her Majesty's Inspector