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16 December 2015

Mr M Gregory  
Principal  
Ark St Alban's Academy  
Conybere Street  
Birmingham  
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Dear Mr Gregory

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Ark St Alban's Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 7 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 me and the time you took to discuss the progress of your academy.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector had cause to be concerned about exclusions in the academy over the last four years which have been above the national average.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection I considered a range of evidence, including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour around the academy throughout the day
- discussions with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with academy leaders and staff
- discussions with a group of parents and consideration of 184 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

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

Leaders and managers have taken effective action, through the proportionate use of exclusions, to maintain and improve the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the academy's previous inspection.

## **Context**

With 633 pupils on roll, this is a much smaller than average 11–18 academy, although it has grown considerably since the previous inspection in October 2011. Almost all pupils come from minority ethnic groups and the large majority speak English as an additional language. Three quarters of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is therefore well above the national average. The majority of the academy's pupils are boys and in some year groups only 30% are girls. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average. A small number of pupils are looked after.

The new Principal took up post in September 2015.

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

At the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour was judged to be outstanding and their attendance was judged to be satisfactory.

The behaviour of pupils observed during the inspection was of a very high standard. They were smartly dressed and wore their uniform with pride. In lessons, pupils were interested and engaged. They worked hard and were proud of their achievements. Pupils with special educational needs were especially enthusiastic as they improved their literacy in 'reading recovery lessons' where their progress was palpable. Pupils in Year 7 have adjusted well into the academy's high academic expectations. A very challenging discussion of Spanish grammar was conducted almost entirely in Spanish. Pupils in Year 9 were eager to show their bottle openers that they had made in design and technology, and pupils in Year 11 worked hard to analyse their recent mock examinations so that they could learn from their mistakes. In lessons in which pupils did not have their usual teacher, they were slower to settle and worked less hard but, even here, their behaviour was polite and compliant.

Pupils confirmed that low-level disruption is rare because the teachers apply the academy's behaviour policy consistently. More serious disruption of lessons is dealt with by removing the disruptive pupil to 'internal isolation', allowing the class to continue in peace. Pupils may be placed in internal isolation as a result of disrupting a lesson or for other misdemeanours, such as failing to attend a detention. The academy's records indicate that such incidents take place fairly frequently, with approximately 200 so far this term.

At the start of the day, at break and lunchtimes, and at the end of the day, the academy was calm and orderly. At these social times, pupils made good use of the dining hall or gathered in friendship groups in the main atrium or outside. Pupils were sensible, polite and courteous. They appeared happy and friendly, and

demonstrated respect for their environment. There was no litter in the academy building and very little outside. I heard no foul or disrespectful language throughout the day of the inspection.

Lunchtime and breaks were staggered throughout the day so that only a proportion of pupils had a break at any one time. While one, two or three year groups had a break, the remainder of the academy continued with lessons in an atmosphere of calm and quiet. There was a high staff presence around the academy at social times and many staff ate with pupils in the dining hall while others supervised the building and outside. At the end of breaks and lunchtimes, pupils lined up quietly and made their way into lessons sensibly.

Since 2011, pupils' attendance has improved considerably such that, in 2014/15, both overall absence and persistent absence were well below national levels. The academy's data for this year indicate the trend will continue. During the inspection, pupils were punctual throughout the day. The visible staff presence, including the Principal, meeting and greeting pupils encouraged this good punctuality and ensured a positive start to the day.

The academy's behaviour policy is clear, prescriptive and details the sanctions that teachers should apply when pupils misbehave. It includes a code of conduct for pupils. Leaders say that they need to revise the academy's policy and procedures for rewarding pupils in order to encourage good behaviour and they are currently undertaking this work. Younger pupils felt that the behaviour policy was too strict, but older pupils appreciated more the part that they felt it had played in ensuring that they made good academic progress. One pupil, who had previously been excluded, explained that, because of the academy's strictness and the care of his teachers, he 'had become a better person'.

Staff applied the academy's policies consistently. Staff were very proud of being part of the 'St Alban's team' and they all cited expectations of good behaviour as a key factor in the academy's rapid improvement. The Principal and senior leaders have successfully created a strong culture that, for most pupils, promotes excellent behaviour. Staff consistently modelled calm and respectful behaviour to their pupils. They have been trained to be 'strict and warm', that is, to adhere to the academy behaviour policy but to do so with warmth, respect and friendliness.

The large number of responses to Parent View and the group of parents with whom I spoke both confirm that parents fiercely support the academy and they are very appreciative of the quality of education that their children receive at St Alban's.

During the last four years, the academy's rate of permanent exclusion has been very high in comparison with the national average, although the small cohort sizes mean the data should be treated with caution. That said, the trend in permanent exclusions in the last two years has been downwards.

The proportion of fixed-term exclusions, including for those with special educational needs, has also been above the national average since the inspection in 2011. The academy's own data suggest that this figure will remain above average this year, although, as with permanent exclusions, the rate has been decreasing in the last two years.

Until recently, leaders did not routinely analyse exclusions, behaviour and attendance data by different pupil groups or characteristics, so they were not able to spot patterns and trends, and then target intervention to where it could make the most difference. Reducing exclusions had not been a high priority for the academy's leaders and governors. The academy's self-evaluation and development priorities made no mention of exclusions and the local governing body's meetings minutes do not indicate that governors are aware that exclusions are high compared with national figures.

This has all changed with the appointment of the new Principal. His leadership and moral purpose, ably supported by senior leaders and staff, have created a culture in which pupils are able to flourish and achieve well. No pupils have been permanently excluded since his appointment. Leaders are now aware of the need to maintain excellent pupil behaviour while seeking over time to reduce the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. They have introduced new exclusion protocols this year that they intend will have this effect.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

Continue to maintain the excellent behaviour in the academy which has supported pupils' achievement well while reducing the use of fixed-term and permanent exclusions, particularly for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, by:

- routinely analysing all behaviour data by pupil group so that patterns and trends are spotted quickly
- carefully targeting extra help and support to groups and individuals who need it
- ensuring that governors are examining academy exclusion data, comparing it with national benchmarks and holding leaders to account.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham, the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**