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Mr Russell Heritage
Principal
Sheffield Springs Academy
Hurlfield Road
Sheffield
S12 2SF

Dear Mr Heritage

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sheffield Springs Academy

Following my visit to your school with Joan Hewitt, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 11 January 2013, 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and other senior leaders, the Chair of the School Improvement Board, representatives of the sponsor, United Learning and a group of external partners. Inspectors were taken on a tour of the school by four Year 10 students and had other informal discussions with students during social times. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Four additional senior leaders have joined the academy since the last section 5 inspection and a fifth will take up post after February half term. Two of these senior appointments are permanent with the remaining posts on a fixed-term or secondment basis. A temporary lead teacher of English has been appointed. Two further short-term appointments have been made to increase staffing stability in geography and design and technology. Three teachers have left the academy since the section 5 inspection. A teacher exchange with Sheffield Park Academy, another academy managed by the same sponsor, has resulted in three learning and teaching associates joining the staff at Sheffield Springs on a secondment basis. It has also resulted in two newly qualified teachers and a trainee teacher on the graduate teacher programme, originally located in Sheffield Springs, now working at the Sheffield Park Academy. Six support staff appointments have also been made to help address priorities related to provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs, students' attendance and the advice and guidance available to students.

Since the section 5 inspection there have been changes to the academy's governance arrangements with the establishment of a School Improvement Board (SIB). The SIB has an externally appointed, independent chair. The chairs of the newly formed local governing body committees are part of the improvement board along with members of the academy's senior leadership team, a representative of the sponsor, a representative of Sheffield local authority and an observer from the Department for Education.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders, including the Chair of the School Improvement Board and the sponsor, fully understand the scale and urgency of improvement required. A brisk start has been made to securing additional staffing, improving systems to track students' progress and brokering useful partnerships that will help to tackle the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Senior and middle leaders appointed since the inspection have been carefully chosen to bring the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise needed to strengthen the academy's leadership, 'kick start' improvement and provide effective role models for existing leaders, classroom teachers and other staff. Additional, valuable expertise from external partners, including the local authority and a local teaching school alliance has also been secured to enhance 'in-house' support and provision.

A detailed plan is in place to address the areas for improvement identified and a summary has been shared with all staff. Timescales for the completion of actions are

identified but some of these lack precision. Quantified targets for achievement, behaviour, attendance and teaching quality have been set for 2013 and 2014 but measurable 'milestones' have not been identified to better enable the monitoring of progress towards these expectations during the academic year. Steps are being taken to improve teaching quality and approximately half of the academy's teachers have a personal professional development plan to help them improve their practice. However, although a further quarter of teaching staff have been recently observed their personal development plans have yet to be put in place.

While much development work is at an early stage of implementation there are early signs that attendance is starting to improve and behaviour management policies are being more consistently applied. Minutes of the recent meeting of the School Improvement Board indicate there is already a greater degree of challenge for school leaders and a commitment to securing rapid and sustainable improvement.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the School Improvement Board and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector