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13 May 2013

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

Dear Mr Heritage

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sheffield Springs Academy

Following my visit with Anne Seneviratne Her Majesty's Inspector, Keith Worrall Additional Inspector and Phil Smith Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 9 and 10 May 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 previous monitoring inspection.

This inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012. 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:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

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 and the Chair of the School Improvement Board.

Yours sincerely

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- Ensure the quality of teaching is always good or better, so as to raise attainment and improve students' achievement, including in mathematics and especially English, by:
 - taking swift steps to deal with inadequate teaching
 - providing further professional development and targeted support to meet the needs of teachers, especially those who are newly qualified, and checking that this is having a positive impact on their teaching
 - ensuring that teachers take account of what students already know, the progress they have made and their targets when planning lessons in order to match work closely to the full range of students' learning needs
 - ensuring that the tasks and strategies used in lessons interest students and make them keen to learn
 - giving students detailed feedback on how to improve their work
 - improving students' skills in literacy, communication and numeracy so that these are good enough to help them make good progress in all subjects
 - narrowing the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students so that they all achieve equally well, particularly boys and students with special educational needs
 - modifying the curriculum so that it enables all students to achieve well.

- Improve behaviour and attendance by:
 - ensuring that all staff follow an agreed strategy for managing students' behaviour so that the low-level misbehaviour and occasional more serious incidents are eradicated
 - ensuring that the recently introduced strategies for improving attendance and reducing persistent absence are implemented effectively so that attendance rises and is at least in line with the national average.

- Improve the leadership, management and governance of the academy so that they become fully effective and secure rapid improvements in teaching and outcomes for students by:
 - ensuring that all leaders, especially those who lead and manage subjects, and governors have the knowledge, skills and understanding to carry out their roles effectively
 - academy sponsors ensuring that the capacity to make and sustain substantial improvement over time in all aspects of the academy's work is clearly demonstrable
 - implementing plans for improvement and carefully checking that they are having the intended impact.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 May 2013

Evidence

Inspectors met with the Principal, senior and curriculum area leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the School Improvement Board and members of the local governing body, a representative of the sponsor and staff who joined the academy in this academic year. Inspectors observed 31 part lessons, two jointly with senior leaders. They scrutinised a range of documents including the academy's analysis of students' current attainment and progress, records from the monitoring of teaching quality and data on students' attendance and behaviour. Students' outcomes and provision in the sixth form were not a focus for this monitoring visit.

Context

One additional senior leader and two teachers have joined the academy since the last monitoring inspection. Some roles and responsibilities of members of the senior leadership team have been revised. Three members of the local governing body have resigned.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Data from the tracking of students' attainment and progress indicate that improvements in teaching, including the increased use of additional focused one-to-one and smaller group teaching, are beginning to raise standards and narrow some of the gaps in performance between different groups of students. However, data show an uneven picture of improvement in the proportion of students making expected progress in English and mathematics in each year group. For students currently in Year 11, marks from early entry to GCSE examinations and assessments show a greater proportion are on track to gain five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics than in previous years. The attainment gap between the performance of boys and girls in Year 11 is set to narrow markedly in 2013 although girls are still outperforming boys. The academy has been less successful in narrowing gaps in attainment for students known to be eligible for free school meals and their non-eligible peers. For disabled students and those with special educational needs, the attainment gap is predicted to narrow in mathematics but widen in English. Students who need support to develop their reading skills are receiving additional teaching and this is having a positive impact. Mentoring and individual support for Key Stage 3 students who are most at risk of underachievement are valued by students and there are early signs that this is helping to tackle low prior attainment and underperformance. Most Key Stage 4 students who have more recently started to attend alternative provision for part of the academy week are responding positively with improved attendance and this is increasing their chance to gain qualifications.

The quality of teaching

Good teaching remains in the minority and although the proportion of inadequate teaching is on the decline, the academy is unlikely to succeed in meeting its target to eliminate inadequate teaching by the end of the summer term. Leaders have a detailed and accurate view of teaching quality across the academy and are using this information more effectively to shape whole-school training, guide teachers to attend specific workshops and put in place

individual packages of support to improve teachers' practice. All staff have received training on how to develop students' literacy skills through their subject teaching and inspectors' observations confirm that teachers are placing more emphasis on this in their planning and teaching. Teachers are also more aware of the need to plan for the needs of different learners in each class but often, where teaching was less than good, work was not sufficiently well matched to students' needs, particularly those with higher prior attainment. As at the time of the section 5 inspection, learning in lessons is frequently less than good because teaching approaches do not successfully engage or enthuse students and inappropriate behaviour is not managed effectively. Progress in developing marking, so that students receive detailed feedback on what they need to do to improve, is limited.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Higher expectations for students' behaviour and appearance have been introduced but the extent to which these are being implemented by all staff is very variable; this inconsistency is limiting impact. Poor attitudes and low levels of motivation remain a barrier to learning for a small, but significant, minority of students. During lessons and around the academy, students were observed being unresponsive to staff and disrespectful to fellow students. At times, poor student behaviour, such as inappropriate comments or language, was not challenged and agreed systems for managing behaviour were not utilised. Despite this, students say behaviour around the academy is calmer. Recorded incidents of inappropriate behaviour, although high, are declining. Similarly, following an initial rise, the number of fixed-term exclusions is also falling steadily. Systems to reduce the number of students choosing to miss or leave lessons during the day are beginning to have a positive impact. Overall, attendance is showing modest signs of improvement but not equally for all groups of learners. More rigorous monitoring of absence and increasingly extensive work with individuals who are persistent absentees and their families are helping to improve the attendance of targeted students.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Leaders and managers are focusing more sharply on the key priorities for the academy; self-evaluation is honest and accurately highlights the extent of improvement required. Leaders are striking an appropriate balance between the use of 'quick fixes' to try to do the best for those students in Key Stage 4 most at risk of underachievement and embedding sustainable improvements in achievement, teaching quality and behaviour. For example, following some swift adjustments to provision for students currently in Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been fully reviewed and redesigned for September 2013 in the drive to promote better achievement in all year groups. Although senior leaders are determined to secure rapid and significant improvement within the academy, staff feel well supported; they understand the academy's priorities and recognise the importance of their contribution to helping to address these issues. Senior leaders who have joined the academy since the section 5 inspection have brought valuable skills and expertise to the team. They have quickly developed a clear understanding of the current position and are beginning to take action to address weaknesses in their areas of responsibility. Systematic training and support for curriculum area leaders are helping them to develop their skills and confidence. As a result, they are starting to contribute to improving teaching quality and raising attainment in their respective departments. The academy is working hard to build a closer relationship with its feeder schools and improve transition for Year 6 pupils. For example, current Year 6 pupils are engaging in a project to study aspects of Sheffield, which will be continued further when

they enter Year 7. Broadening partnerships with the community, including local universities and sports teams, are being used with increasing effect to work with identified students to raise attainment and increase their aspirations. The School Improvement Board is monitoring the academy's progress closely. Recently formed committees within the local governing body are enabling governors to focus more closely on particular aspects of the academy's work, while building stronger foundations for the academy's governance in the longer term.

External support

The sponsor is effectively supporting the academy's improvement and the development of leadership capacity. Extensive additional resources have been provided to tackle weaknesses rapidly. However, the sponsor is equally committed to ensuring improvements are sustainable over time. Creative approaches are being used to try and address the difficulty in recruiting experienced, 'good or better' teachers to fill current vacancies. Links with the local authority, a sister academy in the city and a Teaching School Alliance in the area are being used as a valuable source of additional expertise. These external partnerships are contributing to developments in leadership and teaching and to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable students are better met.