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13 February 2014

Mr Russell Heritage
Executive 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 Mary Lanovy-Taylor, Additional Inspector, and Susan Barkway, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 February 2014, 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth 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 am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). However, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint more than six NQTs in total and no more than two NQTs per subject department.

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, the Chair of the Academy Improvement Board and the Interim Executive Director Children Young People and Families for Sheffield.

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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 11 to 12 February 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with Executive Principal and senior leaders, a group of middle leaders, three groups of students, the Chair of the Academy Improvement Board and representatives of the sponsor. Inspectors observed 27 part lessons, four jointly with senior leaders, and made a few shorter visits including two small-group intervention sessions. Inspectors looked at samples of students' work in lessons, attended an assembly and spoke with students informally during social times.

Context

Three teachers have left the academy since the last monitoring inspection and a further five teachers are due to leave by the end of the summer term. Three teachers, all with a leadership responsibility, are absent long term and there have been a significant number of short-term staff absences.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Academy data show a mixed picture of improvement in students' achievement. At all key stages, the extent of improvement in students' attainment and progress is very variable resulting in gaps in performance both narrowing and widening compared with earlier data. This variation is evident between, and within subjects, and for different groups of learners. It reflects the wide difference in teaching quality that still exists across the academy and the detrimental impact of teacher absence.

The proportion of Year 11 students on track to gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, in 2014 is predicted to at least match results in 2013. This is in a context of lower student starting points, changes to the qualifications that are 'counted' for this measure and a different structure to the assessment of GCSE English. Year 11 mock examinations in all subjects have been used to check current performance and identify for each individual student the particular topics in each subject that they need to work on to improve. Plans are in place to carry out further 'mocks' to inform students' final examination preparation. At Key Stage 3, increasing numbers of students are on track to make at least expected progress in both English and mathematics. Interventions, such as small group teaching and one-to-one support, are helping to address gaps in students' knowledge and understanding and to accelerate their progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4. The achievement of students in the sixth form is being more effectively supported and they are receiving extensive individual help to secure their progression into further or higher education or an apprenticeship.

Work to improve students' literacy skills is having a more positive impact. Recent strategies, such as the use of reading volunteers from the community, are helping students develop their confidence in reading more quickly so they are able to access learning in other subjects better. Teachers are beginning to take greater responsibility for improving students' writing and communication skills through their subject teaching and some effective practice was observed during the inspection. However, this is not common across all teaching. For example, too few teachers insist students speak in full sentences, using good spoken

English, or present their written work well. Weaknesses in students' numeracy skills are not being as systematically identified or addressed as those in literacy. For some students, at both key stages, this is slowing improvement in their progress in mathematics. Although improving, many students are still lacking the skills and confidence needed to be able to make good progress in their own work.

The quality of teaching

Work to support teachers to improve their practice has had a positive impact on a number of individuals. As a result of this and robust action by senior leaders to tackle underperformance, the proportion of inadequate teaching has reduced significantly since the last monitoring inspection. Where the quality of teaching is judged to require improvement 'good elements' are being increasingly observed. Where students were seen to be making good progress, relationships between teachers and students were strong, teachers were providing interesting and challenging tasks that required students to work things out for themselves and questioning and other assessment activities were used effectively to check students' understanding and adjust teaching if necessary. While there is good teaching in all subjects there is still not enough of this quality across the academy to address rapidly the extensive past underperformance of many students, especially those in Key Stage 4. Furthermore, some students in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are still not making the progress that they should due to teacher absence and/or weaker teaching. In a few lessons observed, behaviour was not managed sufficiently well to enable learning to proceed effectively; in others, behaviour deteriorated because teaching did not engage and sustain students' interest successfully.

Regular marking of students' work that incorporates clear guidance on how to improve is an academy expectation. While there is some good practice emerging, inspectors observed and students confirm that the regularity of marking and quality of feedback are very variable between different teachers. Currently, only a small minority of teachers are giving students time to address comments and make improvements to their work so the impact of feedback on improving their learning is limited.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy continues to improve. The number of positive behaviour points recorded is increasing and the number of negative behaviour incidents is declining. These data reflect better student attitudes to learning and more courteous, respectful behaviour towards staff and each other. However, for some students, disruptions to learning which slow their progress are still too frequent, for example, when students shout out or do not display positive attitudes to learning. In part, this is because not all teachers have consistently high expectations for students' behaviour or they do not successfully apply the academy's behaviour policy.

The upward trend in attendance has been sustained and overall attendance is currently 1.6% higher than for the same period last year. The number of students who are persistently absent is continuing to decrease. In many cases, work with individual students and their families where attendance or behaviour concerns have been identified is having a measurable impact.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders are unrelenting in their efforts to bring about improvement. They are rightly frustrated that progress in raising attainment and improving teaching, although evident, is not more rapid. Staff absence, staff turnover and recruitment difficulties are diluting the impact of their actions and the contribution of middle leaders to improvement remains too variable. Senior leaders' evaluation of student performance and teaching quality is accurate and honest. While improvements are rightly celebrated, senior leaders recognise the extent of improvement still required. Actions to bring about improvement are being carefully balanced between urgently addressing past underperformance at Key Stage 4 and ensuring students entering the academy in Year 7 build successfully on their starting points. Individual advice for each student in Year 9 and Year 11 is helping to ensure that they are guided more effectively about the most appropriate choice of qualifications and suitable post-16 progression routes.

Senior leaders' detailed knowledge of the performance of individual staff is enabling them to put in place increasingly bespoke support and professional development opportunities. For example, a number of staff in English, mathematics and science are being helped to develop their skills further by observing and being coached by specialist leaders in education. There is a much stronger link between the quality of teachers' performance and their pay progression. Work to develop subject leaders so they can accurately evaluate performance, hold teachers to account for students' progress and drive improvement in teaching and students' achievement is extensive. While this is beginning to have a positive impact in some subjects it is less evident in others. The academy's analysis of the performance of different groups, cohorts, subjects and classes is robust but academy leaders are rightly continuing to focus on ensuring that all teachers are assessing students' attainment accurately. Data are being used much more effectively to target support for students who need additional help to make faster progress.

Members of the local governing body committees are increasingly challenging senior leaders about the academy's performance. They have a secure understanding of improvements made. Three new governors have been successfully recruited to extend the skills and expertise the local governing body. Academy leaders are working extensively to increase the involvement of parents in their child's education. Attendance at parents' evening is steadily improving and communication with parents about their child's progress is more frequent. Governors and leaders report that perceptions of the academy within the community and beyond are beginning to improve.

External support

Academy leaders are drawing on a wide range of external support to improve teaching, middle leadership and governance. For example, a link with a local teaching school alliance is providing effective individual professional development for teachers and senior leaders from another local secondary school are sitting on governing body committees to help develop the effectiveness of governance. The sponsor remains strongly committed to supporting the academy's improvement. There is an acknowledgement by the sponsor that more must be done to support senior leaders to address recruitment and retention issues urgently and to strengthen middle leadership.