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19 June 2014

Mr Des Bird
Headteacher
Richard Rose Morton Academy
Wigton Road
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA2 6LB

Dear Mr Bird

Special measures monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Morton Academy

Following my visit with Additional Inspectors Catherine Laing and Denis Oliver to your academy on 17 and 18 June 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. 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 after consultation with the lead Her Majesty's Inspector.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pritchard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching in order to ensure that all students, particularly of middle and higher ability achieve well, especially in English and mathematics, by:
 - making sure that all teachers use the assessment information they have about the students to plan and deliver lessons that meet their needs
 - raising teachers' expectations of students' capabilities, ensuring that the work students are given to do is challenging, makes them think hard and, as a result, deepens their understanding
 - ensuring that students do not rely too heavily on their teachers and giving them more opportunities to find out things for themselves
 - ensuring that teachers regularly check students' understanding in lessons and adjust their teaching if students do not demonstrate a firm grasp of what is being taught
 - taking immediate steps to address gaps in students' knowledge and understanding, particularly in English and mathematics, in order to make up for weaknesses in teaching over time
 - ensuring that teachers consistently follow the academy's marking policy so that students are clear about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work and so learn from their mistakes.
- Improve students' behaviour, particularly in lessons, in order to maximise their achievement, by:
 - encouraging all students to take a positive approach to their learning and the opportunities provided by their teachers
 - increasing students' attendance and reducing persistent absence, particularly those students supported by the pupil premium or with special educational needs.
- Improve the effectiveness of the leadership team, by:
 - strengthening their accountability for securing good or better teaching, particularly the role of middle leaders in carrying out their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring that the procedures they adopt for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the quality of teaching and learning are rigorous, robust and have positive impact
 - using teachers' performance management effectively, to drive up standards in teaching and raise students' achievement.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17 to 18 June 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, members of staff with responsibility for subjects and three groups of students. The inspectors also met with a representative of the school improvement board, teachers with leadership responsibilities, and spoke to the academy sponsor. Thirteen lesson observations were completed, three of which were done jointly with members of the senior leadership team. A work scrutiny of Year 7 and Year 10, English, mathematics and science books was undertaken by the inspectors.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, an assistant headteacher and five teachers have left the academy. There has also been a re-structuring of the senior leadership team.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The proportion of students forecasted to achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is expected to rise this year. The data the academy has about students' achievement is much more reliable. As a result, the academy has been able to intervene quickly when students have not achieved. The academy's own data predicts a further rise in achievement in 2015 and beyond. Progress in Key Stage 3 has also improved across a range of subjects. This is because of better day-to-day teaching. There has been a strong focus on marking and feedback, which is starting to have an impact in some lessons.

Intervention sessions in English and mathematics have plugged the gaps in students' knowledge ensuring they have a better chance of achieving their potential. The attainment gap between students who are supported by the pupil premium and those who are not, is narrowing but it is still wide.

The progress students are expected to make in mathematics is not as high as English. This is because there are still some gaps in the students' understanding, and the quality of teaching over time needs to improve further. Also, achievement in science is not expected to improve dramatically due to long-term staff absence and a reliance on temporary staff. However, the academy reports that permanent staff will be in place for the start of the new term.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has been a focus for improvement in the academy. Students are now making more progress in lessons. The academy has set up a series of opportunities for the teachers to improve their practice, and this is starting to have an impact on the quality of teaching. Marking and tailoring the lessons to meet the needs of students has been a focus of the professional development. More needs to be done to embed the improvement and make sure the best practice is spread across the academy. As a result of some of the training, there are some examples of conscientious marking which is personalised and supportive. However, in some books mistakes are not identified, with little consistency in feedback.

Overall, the quality of teaching is still too variable. The amount of inadequate teaching has been dramatically reduced, but there is still too much teaching that is not yet good enough. This is mainly in areas where staffing is not settled, and where permanent teachers have not yet taken up their posts. Where teaching is strong, there is good verbal and written feedback from teachers and students' attitudes towards their learning are good.

Planning is comprehensive and there is a great deal of data teachers can use to plan their lessons. This data is now more reliable and is being used to hold teachers and subject leaders to account for the progress students make.

The quality and amount of homework is variable. The academy recognises this and has plans to address the situation. Challenging work is given to students in many lessons, but in some areas there is still a need to raise teachers' expectations of what students can achieve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students and staff report that behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection. The systems are in place and are used more consistently. Students' attitudes to learning have also improved and the academy is calm, with a purposeful atmosphere. Students are polite and respectful. The building is well kept, with little or no sign of litter.

The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen significantly. Attendance has also improved significantly due to the targeted work of the attendance and inclusion team.

Many of the students are keen to learn. Instances of low-level disruption are rare, and only occur when teaching is poor. The students are happy to talk about the improvements in the academy. They are clear that good behaviour is important for them to learn and make the progress in lessons.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership team are ambitious for the academy. They want to improve as quickly as possible. This ambition is shared by the school improvement board and the sponsor. However, they are equally keen that this improvement is sustainable and do not want a quick fix, which would see the academy decline in future years.

Lesson observations are completed regularly and, as a result, bespoke packages of support are in place for some teachers to enable them to improve their teaching and for their students to make better progress. Middle leaders are benefiting from some training to enable them to challenge members of staff more. Senior leaders are accurate in their judgements about the progress students make and clear about how teaching has an impact on this progress.

Middle leaders still need to be given more responsibility for driving the improvement in the quality of teaching. There is some very good teaching in the academy, but authentic sharing of this good work within and between subject areas is not good enough.

The school improvement board meets regularly and focuses on the students' outcomes and holds the leadership of the academy to account for the improvements needed. However, it is not unrealistic and understands that there is a long way to go, but has plans to build on the positive start. Leadership, reliable data, learning and behaviour have been the focus for improvement.

The school improvement plan is comprehensive and is looked at regularly to ensure the improvement milestones are met. Where issues have not been addressed, they are highlighted as a priority for action. The academy also has evaluated itself. On the whole, it has an accurate view of the progress made since the last inspection, but needs to remember that there is still a long way to go.

The student council contributes to leadership and gathers opinions. The academy is responsive to their contributions, which is appreciated by the student body.

External support

The sponsor is the main source of support. A consultant has worked with senior and middle leaders to develop the academy's approach to improving data. Consultants have also been used to work in subject areas to drive up the quality of teaching. However, a great deal of the work has been done by the academy staff themselves, only looking to the sponsor when needed.