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3 July 2014

Mr Neil Hutchinson
Headteacher
Richard Rose Central Academy
Victoria Place
Carlisle
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Dear Mr Hutchinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Central Academy

Following my visit with Andrew Henderson and Rebecca Lawton, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 1 and 2 July 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint any more newly qualified teachers at this time.

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 Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better by ensuring that:
 - inadequate teaching is rapidly eradicated
 - all teachers have high expectations of students and use the information they have about their attainment to set work that is challenging for all abilities
 - students are given clear, regular and helpful feedback on their work and the level at which they are working so they understand how to improve
 - teachers apply the academy's behaviour policy consistently in lessons and ensure that all students know what is expected of them.

- Raise standards, especially in English, mathematics and science, by consistently using and meeting targets based on students making at least three levels of progress between Years 7 and 11.

- Improve attendance in all year groups, including in the sixth form, so that it is at least in line with the national average

- Improve the impact of the academy's leaders by:
 - ensuring that governors, senior and middle leaders are more actively involved in evaluating the academy's work and respond rapidly to the priorities for improvement
 - ensuring that action plans are sharply focused on the most urgent priorities, and that the academy's progress in tackling them is checked frequently and rigorously.

- Governors must improve the quality of their work by:
 - ensuring that they have a thorough understanding of whether the work done to improve the academy's performance is making any difference
 - supporting leaders in ensuring that all teachers are held responsible for the progress of the students they teach and are provided with appropriate training to help them improve their teaching
 - ensuring that pupil premium funding has a positive impact on the achievement of students for whom it is intended
 - taking part and responding to an external review of governance to identify what support and training governors need.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 1 to 2 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the executive Principal, the Chair of the School Improvement Board, six members of the Local Governing Body, zone leaders, teachers and students. They observed teaching in a range of subjects and scrutinised Year 7 and Year 9 students' work in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, art and history. The sixth form was not a focus for this monitoring inspection.

Context

Two teachers and a number of support staff have left the academy since the last monitoring visit.

Staffing has been reviewed and leadership has been restructured, resulting in a number of changes that will take effect from 1 September 2014. The transfer of teaching staff and contracts to the new sponsor, United Learning, is on-going and will complete on 1 September 2014. Full transfer of all sponsor functions is also planned for 1 September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

This monitoring inspection focused on students' progress at Key Stage 3. Students' English books show they are now making more rapid progress in Years 7 to 9. Their written work shows high expectations and ambition for students, with challenging tasks that help them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding effectively. The proportion of students making expected progress in English, from their starting points, is increasing and closer to national averages. The most able students make the quickest progress. The progress of lower ability students is hampered by gaps in their understanding of spelling and grammar.

In mathematics, students are making faster progress than they were previously, but they are still making insufficient progress from their starting points. There are gaps in students' understanding because key mathematical skills have not been taught systematically enough. This has been exacerbated by staffing issues resulting in a lack of continuity in teaching for some students. Progress in science has accelerated recently, alongside improvements in teaching. As in English, the most able students make the quickest progress. Academy data indicate that students' progress is quickening in other subjects.

The quality of teaching

Teachers are expecting more of students and providing more challenging work. Teaching is most effective when it builds on students' prior learning so that they gain new knowledge, improve their understanding and develop skills progressively over time. In English, art, design and technology, for example, students analysed and improved their work effectively because they had a clear understanding of how to achieve higher levels. In history and geography, students were taught to evaluate evidence from different sources. In French, misunderstandings and gaps in students' knowledge of key verbs were addressed before moving on. In all these examples, the teachers' clear explanation and probing questioning helped students deepen their understanding and make connections with prior learning.

There is still too much variation, however, both within and between subjects. Some teachers are not paying sufficient attention to building on students' prior knowledge and skills systematically. Planning is sometimes focused too much on what the teacher does and the activities students will complete, without sufficient attention to what students already know. The support for students with special educational needs is similarly variable. Students make most progress in individual teaching sessions and small group literacy support. However, the in-class support is too variable and the impact is not checked well enough.

Marking has improved, although students need further guidance on how to respond to comments effectively. There are some very good examples where teachers' comments provide further challenge, explain misconceptions or correct errors. However, teachers do not make it clear that students are expected to make changes in their work. All teachers are levelling or grading work regularly to demonstrate students' progress. However, levelling is not always accurate, particularly for students in lower ability groups. At times, work is levelled too highly and this can lead to gaps in students' learning, particularly when there is a change of teacher.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students feel that the academy has improved and is a 'good place to be'. The majority are loyal and positive about their experiences. Many told inspectors that they feel inspired by teachers and can always ask for help with their work. Students feel safe and able to talk to staff about concerns. They know there is still some inappropriate behaviour but trust staff to deal with it effectively.

The vast majority of students are respectful and display positive attitudes to learning, for example, by doing their best to stay on task and cooperate with the teacher. The most positive attitudes are shown by older students. They want to learn and show concentration and perseverance when given challenging tasks. There are times when students' concentration wanders because they have not been given

clear instructions. There are still isolated incidents where students are immature and show off in class, which gets in the way of the learning of others.

Students are sociable and well behaved in shared areas of the academy. Punctuality to lessons has improved and truancy following morning registration has significantly reduced due to better monitoring and supervision. Attendance has improved compared to a similar period last year, although it is still below average. The attendance of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs is much lower than other students and this has a negative impact on the achievement of these groups.

Leaders work assiduously to accommodate the needs of students with challenging behaviour and help them to learn. The use of internal exclusion from lessons is ensuring that lessons proceed without disruption. However, the expectations of students who are removed from lessons are not demanding enough. There are some extreme cases where behaviour cannot be managed in the academy and formal exclusion procedures have to be used.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The recently appointed headteacher has retained the support and trust of staff during a difficult period in which staffing and leadership have been restructured and contracts transferred to the new sponsor. The senior leadership team members work well together and provide stability. Leaders have secured subject specialists and appointed new leaders from within the staff and externally to ensure there are no gaps at the start of the next academic year. They have taken suitable steps to eradicate inadequate teaching through professional development and support plans.

Senior leaders have driven through some key improvements to teaching and behaviour. Students say teaching is more varied and interesting and they are more engaged in lessons. Leaders have a realistic view of the challenges still facing the academy and are taking appropriate action to tackle weaknesses. Quickening students' progress in mathematics, securing stability in teaching staff and maintaining a positive climate for learning are prime objectives.

Zone leaders have a better understanding of their responsibilities but do not have sufficient clarity or guidance about how their roles should be carried out. For example, while they know they are to check the effectiveness of teaching some are not sure how this should be done. Consequently, some zone leaders are not rigorous enough in checking the quality of teaching and students' progress in their subjects.

Governors are well informed about improvements and challenges. The School Improvement Board provides the main drive for improvement, while the Local Governing Body develops and works alongside. The executive Principal ensures all are well informed and provides appropriate support and challenge to senior leaders.

External support

External support comes mainly from United Learning. Consultants have provided useful professional development in English and mathematics, supporting improvements to teaching and in the use of data. The academy has recently formed a link with an outstanding school to support professional development and has links with local schools, supporting developments in leadership.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure teaching builds on students' knowledge and skills progressively and systematically over time.
- Clarify the expectations of zone leaders in checking and reporting on students' progress and the quality of teaching, including through detailed scrutiny of students' work.