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10 July 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 Bernard Campbell Her Majesty's Inspector and Henry Moreton, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 8 and 9 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 fifth 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.

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 School Improvement Board, the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit, the Education Funding Agency and the Director of Children's Services 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, including teaching and learning in lessons, scrutinised documents and met with Executive Principal, other senior leaders, two groups of staff, three groups of students, the Chair of the School Improvement Board, other governors and representatives of the sponsor. Inspectors also spoke informally to students at the start of the academy day and during social times.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three teachers have left the academy and a further 11 teachers will leave at the end of the summer term, including two subject leaders. Internal appointments have been made for the leadership of art, English and design and technology. Two new, experienced teachers have already taken up post and six newly qualified teachers and three experienced teachers have been appointed for September. The role of special educational needs coordinator is being covered by a senior leader supported by another teacher. One teacher is absent long-term due to ill health.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Academy leaders are confident that GCSE outcomes in 2014 will show that more students are making at least expected progress in English and mathematics than in the previous year. Many Year 11 students were involved in examination preparation activities over the Easter break and during the spring bank holiday, reflecting the increasing willingness of students to try and do their best. Improving progress is evident for most groups of learners in Year 11. However, for others, such as disabled students and those with special educational needs, while the percentage of students on track to make at least expected progress in English is higher than in the previous year, this is not the case in mathematics. For students in Year 10, current GCSE predictions for 2015 do not suggest that attainment and progress in the academy are on a strongly improving trend. In Years 7 and 8, students' progress is on track to be better than in previous years but data show variation in the extent of improvement between subjects in each year group. Retention in the sixth form is better than for previous cohorts and a sharper focus on tracking progress has led to a greater proportion of students meeting or exceeding their 'most likely grade'.

Work to help students develop their literacy skills remains a priority. While some teachers are skilled in promoting students' reading, writing and communication skills through their subject teaching, effective practice is not consistently embedded across the academy and this is limiting the impact on students' achievement. The focus on addressing weaknesses in students' numeracy skills has sharpened since the last monitoring inspection. External support has been used to develop staff expertise and dedicated curriculum time has been provided in Years 7 to 9. Early evidence indicates this is increasing students' engagement but it is too soon to judge

its impact on achievement in mathematics. While teachers' expectations of students have improved in some respects, their expectations for the presentation and quality of students' written work are not consistently high enough.

The quality of teaching

Bespoke in-house support, and support delivered through Specialist Leaders of Education for a targeted group of teachers, has had a positive impact on the practice of most involved. Other colleagues, who needed to improve the quality of their teaching to 'good' or from 'good' to 'outstanding', have also developed as a result of external training programmes. Increasingly, activities are well planned to meet the needs of different groups of students, promote engagement successfully and enable the effective assessment of learning. As a result students are motivated and make good progress. However, the academy's monitoring of the quality and impact of teaching over time shows that improvements are not rapid and consistent in all subjects and weak teaching has not been entirely eradicated. This view is supported by inspection evidence, including work in students' books. In a number of part-lessons observed, teachers were not capitalising sufficiently on the more purposeful approach to learning by students in the classroom. Too often, students were not inspired and motivated to learn well.

Teachers are increasingly taking account of students' abilities when planning learning activities and providing a greater degree of challenge. However, not all teachers are skilful in checking through questioning or other ways of assessing learning as to whether students' understanding is secure. Consequently, some students are moved on to the next activity too quickly, or the need to adjust teaching in the lesson to enable students to make better progress is overlooked. The marking of students' books and the giving of written feedback are more frequent and show a greater consistency of approach than at the time of the last monitoring inspection. However, the quality and impact of this marking and feedback on improving students' learning and progress remain too variable.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of students in the academy continues to improve. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour or low-level disruption are declining further and the number of fixed-term exclusions is falling over time. Students and staff who spoke with inspectors share the view that behaviour is getting better. Students are increasingly polite and courteous, for example, holding open doors for visitors and other staff. Relationships between students and staff are improving. In classrooms, inspectors observed some really productive learning environments built on mutual respect. However, in a small minority of lessons, students were compliant but disengaged or showed poor listening skills and, consequently, their progress was more limited. Developing consistently positive student attitudes to their work remains a priority.

Attendance is on an upward trend and the percentage of students who are persistent absentees is reducing. This is as a result of more effective monitoring of

attendance and the increased level of work with individual students and their families where attendance concerns are identified. The extent of improvement in attendance is not consistent across year groups, with the current Year 9 having the lowest overall attendance. Punctuality at the start of the day is also monitored closely with a sanction for each student who is late once in a week. This has led to a marked improvement in punctuality.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders continue to work cohesively to promote improvement. Their relentless focus on ensuring high aspirations for students is clearly communicated to all staff and, increasingly, these high aspirations are reflected in the work of teachers and other adults in the academy. The contribution of middle leaders to the academy's improvement, although developing, is still seen as a priority for further development by senior leaders.

Since the last monitoring inspection, leaders have resolved a number of staffing difficulties and successfully recruited staff for September to fill vacant posts. Of the six newly qualified teachers, five are benefitting from a three-week induction and training programme this term to increase their familiarity with the academy and the community it serves. In discussion with inspectors, they viewed this as a valuable experience, noting their confidence and readiness for September has been improved as a result. Existing staff who spoke with inspectors were positive about improvements within the academy, particularly in relation to the clarity and consistency of expectations provided by the established senior leadership team.

Robust tracking of students' progress continues to be used effectively to identify and to tackle underperformance. However, for many students, their historic underachievement over a number of years is proving a challenge to address fully. On-going curriculum review and development in all key stages has a clear focus on raising students' aspirations and improving their achievement. Students have been guided more effectively regarding course choices at Key Stage 4 and progression routes at post-16 and post-18. For example, all students in the sixth form on a Level 1 or Level 2 course have been successful in securing a place with a training provider, college or apprenticeship. All students on Level 3 courses in Year 13 have achieved the entry requirements for the next stage of their education.

The academy continues to develop much closer working relationships with its feeder primary schools. Primary school work on 'Springsboard' and the introduction of a common calculation policy for mathematics in the feeder schools and the academy are examples of the range of actions being taken to promote better student progress. The academy's staff are also working hard to build stronger relationships with parents and to improve perceptions of the academy in the community. Celebration events to recognise students' achievements are increasingly well attended.

The School Improvement Board and the governor committees are providing appropriate support and challenge for the academy's leaders. A period of transition is underway as preparations are made to move from governance led by a School Improvement Board to the re-establishment of a local governing body. Some new governors have been appointed, increasing the breadth of the expertise and skills on the future governing body. Governors are working with a National Leader of Governance to develop their understanding of the role and their responsibilities so they are better prepared to provide challenge and support.

External support

The academy's leaders are working with a wide range of external partners to address improvement priorities. The source of any support is chosen carefully and managed closely by senior leaders to ensure it matches the needs of the academy and its staff well. Closer collaboration with the local authority is effectively contributing to the academy's work in a number of areas, including safeguarding. Support provided by 'Learners First' and links with Wingfield Academy have contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching and leadership. The sponsor continues to support the academy in a number of ways. It has, for example, provided additional financial resources to enable the early start of new teachers and has continued to fund a full-time social worker to support the academy's wider work with students and their families. The sponsor has stated a commitment to providing the resources needed, 'whatever it takes' to ensure recent improvements can be sustained and built upon in the run-up to the next section 5 inspection and beyond.