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

Dear Mr Heritage

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sheffield Springs Academy, Sheffield**

Following my visit to your academy on 12 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the continuing development of teaching and of the leadership role of middle leaders results in tangible measures of improvement in student progress across all academic subjects.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, representatives of the United Learning Trust and the Local Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. School improvement plans were evaluated and a brief tour was made of classrooms.

## **Context**

Since the inspection, an assistant principal, a curriculum leader, four teachers and the data manager have left. A senior leader seconded from the partner school, Wingfield Academy, has been made permanent. A leader for design technology, two newly qualified teachers and a data manager have started.

## **Main findings**

You judge correctly that student behaviour and engagement is more secure and that the priority is to bring about more rapid improvement in learning and student progress. As a result, academy plans and professional development activities are rightly directed at improving teaching skills and subject expertise in weaker departments.

The academy continues to face difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers of mathematics. You have identified the need to equip non-specialists with greater subject knowledge. Weekly training sessions led by an external consultant have begun to extend the range of teaching strategies in mathematics. You plan to strengthen mathematics by appointing a director of mathematics for the academy and its partner school.

The English subject leader, appointed in September, has increased the range of extra support for students, aided effectively by an external adviser from Rotherham local authority. She reports that a more structured approach to teaching writing is showing early signs of improving the writing of weaker students.

In science, an enthusiastically-planned professional development programme aims to improve practical work and make more effective use of students' literacy, speaking and numeracy skills. An external adviser has made a valuable contribution to the planning of these sessions.

An education adviser from the United Learning Trust has worked effectively with the leader of humanities to initiate improvements in the use of assessment, curriculum planning and teaching. Leaders report that this has been well received by staff.

You have begun to restructure the support staff in order to focus more sharply on learning. As a first step, support staff have been allocated to subject areas. Curriculum leaders welcome the stronger role of learning support staff in subject teaching and assessment.

The recent national statistical analysis of the academy's 2014 GCSE results shows that students continued to underachieve, especially boys and disadvantaged students. In addition, the academy fell below the government's floor standards for 2013 which set out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. At GCSE and in the sixth form, students performed better in vocational and practical subjects than in academic subjects. Academy data indicate that the current

Year 11 is making better progress in English than the previous year but progress in mathematics has not improved.

You commissioned an independent review of attendance which identified six areas for improvement that senior leaders have acted upon. These are aimed at further improving punctuality and raising attendance. Senior leaders have continued to tighten behaviour management procedures with the result that teachers and middle leaders are more consistently implementing sanctions. A student survey in December showed a significant improvement in the proportion of students with the right equipment for learning in the classroom.

The United Learning Trust has initiated a review of sixth form provision across the trust. The outcomes of this review will determine the next steps in improving the quality of the sixth form.

A Local Governing Board has been set up alongside the School Improvement Board which was in place while the academy was in special measures. The trust has succeeded in appointing more parents to the Local Governing Board. Governors have begun to make links with subject leaders, to develop their understanding of data and to refine their skills in questioning academy performance.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

You and the sponsor have worked together well to deploy external support from the United Learning Trust and local sources. External expertise is well matched to the needs of the academy. This is beginning to improve the quality of subject leadership and teaching but has not yet secured improvements in student progress and attainment.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium has been carried out. You have considered the recommendations and identified actions to be taken.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Director of the United Learning Trust, the Education Funding Agency and the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**