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5 March 2015

Mr Patrick Ferguson
Headteacher
Hope Academy
Ashton Road
Newton-le-Willows
Merseyside
WA12 0AQ

Dear Mr Ferguson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hope Academy

Following my visit with Kathleen Harris and Andrew Henderson, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 3 and 4 March 2015, 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 third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2014. 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 strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children and Young People's Services for St Helens, the Department for Academies Advisors Unit and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the academy, but especially in Key Stage 3, by:
 - ensuring that teachers continue to develop their subject knowledge to ensure that they are able to teach their subjects with confidence
 - developing teachers' skills in using a range of appropriate strategies to enable them to engage with students and impact more effectively on their learning and progress
 - focusing in lessons on developing students' skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject rather than merely completing tasks
 - ensuring that marking is regular, of high quality and informs students on how they can improve their work.

- Improve the progress and achievement of all groups of students, including those in the sixth form, in all subjects, but especially those students supported by pupil premium, boys and the most able, by:
 - making sure assessment and monitoring of student progress is accurate and rigorous to enable appropriate work to be set in order that good learning can take place
 - checking the progress of individuals and groups of students regularly and robustly so that leaders and teachers can take swift action to address any underachievement
 - providing more opportunities for students to develop and apply their skills in mathematics and writing to other subjects
 - giving higher level, more demanding work to the more able students.

- Improve the behaviour and safety of students by:
 - eradicating poor behaviour in lessons to ensure that students' opportunities to learn are not compromised through low-level and persistent disruption
 - ensuring that, as a matter of priority, all students involved in off-site education are safe by making sure that their attendance is recorded and reported to the academy within an hour of when they are due to attend each off-site session
 - ensuring that students attend the academy on a regular basis and that any absenteeism is chased up as a matter of routine.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - increasing the rigour with which teaching is monitored to ensure that teachers are perfectly clear about which aspects need to be improved and why
 - ensuring that monitoring focuses clearly on how well students learn
 - taking swift action to eradicate inadequate teaching
 - making use of the training, resources and advice offered by the various subject associations to provide subject leaders with the knowledge and expertise to enable them to offer appropriate advice to their colleagues on how to further improve their planning and practice
 - requiring all subject leaders to be fully involved in checking that students are making good progress in lessons and that teachers' planning promotes learning which builds on previous lessons
 - making sure that performance management links teachers' pay progression more

- closely to improvement in the classroom
- evaluating the impact of the pupil premium funding on students' learning to ensure that it is being spent wisely and provides good value for money
- ensuring that governors act on the recommendations of the forthcoming independent review of governance.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3–4 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work. They observed parts of 23 lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team, and observed the work of students in the internal exclusion room. They scrutinised a random sample of students' work from across a number of subjects, as well as looking at students' workbooks during lessons. Inspectors met with the Principal and with those members of his leadership team with responsibility for achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance, and the sixth form. Inspectors met with three groups of students and spoke informally to students at other times of the academy day. One inspector held phone conversations with two providers of alternative provision, to check on the attendance and achievement of students currently educated away from the academy site. The lead inspector met with three representatives from the governors' monitoring committee, which included the Chair of Governing Body. Inspectors also considered the 86 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including leaders' analysis of current achievement, attendance and the quality of teaching.

Context

A new Principal has been appointed and took up post at the start of January 2015. The leadership team has been restructured. Two new vice-Principals have been appointed from Easter; one of whom is seconded to work in the academy for two days a week until this time. A number of teaching staff left the academy at the end of last term and the majority of these have been replaced. A new timetable has been introduced, allowing for a fixed lunchtime. This has also reduced the need to split classes between teachers. Governors and the sponsors have established a new monitoring committee, which meets fortnightly in the academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is improving. Leaders have worked quickly to secure a robust picture of achievement in Key Stage 4. Teacher assessment is more accurate and is confirmed through external tests that students take across all subjects. These have been moderated both within subject departments and, in English and mathematics, by support from other schools.

Academy data show that students in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve standards that are much more in line with the national average this year. This is as a direct result of improved teaching and additional intensive programmes of support and intervention for these students. Gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers are also narrowing in this key stage.

The progress that other students make in Key Stages 3 and 4 has also improved since the previous inspection. This is as a direct result of higher expectations of behaviour and improved teaching and assessment across most subjects.

Students are now completing much more work during lessons. For example, in English, students have more opportunities to develop their writing through extended pieces of work. In science, students are now able to develop their investigation skills, as behaviour no longer prevents teachers from planning practical lessons.

However, progress in Key Stage 3 is still hampered by a curriculum that does not yet build progress in knowledge, understanding and skills. Students have insufficient opportunities to develop and practise their literacy skills in other subjects. Where inspectors observed these opportunities, for example in history, it had a noticeable impact on the progress students made in articulating their ideas and understanding.

Achievement in some areas is limited by former decisions made about the curriculum. For example, too few students in Year 11 are on track to achieve a good GCSE qualification in two or more science subjects.

Achievement in the sixth form remains a concern. Leaders have not yet reviewed the study programmes for students in Year 12 to ensure they are on appropriate courses. This is now an urgent priority. Teachers and students have had opportunities to work with a sixth form college to improve sixth form provision. However, the impact of this and plans for improvement in this phase are yet to be shown.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the last monitoring inspection. There is a shared ownership of responsibility from teaching staff to ensure that collective practice improves. A new appraisal system holds teachers very rigorously to account for the progress students make. Students report that teaching has improved, particularly since the start of this term.

Teachers follow a common structure to lesson planning. This directs them to think more carefully about the different ranges of ability in each class. Some teachers use this very well. For example, in a mathematics lesson the teacher quickly established what students could already do before setting different activities according to students' ability. As a result, they got on quickly with their work, demonstrated new learning and were challenged by the work set. However, this is not always the case. In particular, some teachers continue to need guidance to be able to set learning that will stretch the most able students.

Not all teachers have the confidence to plan opportunities for students to discuss their work together and share ideas in class. They continue to plan lessons that are

based on completing tasks rather than on developing learning. Where this happens, students develop a superficial knowledge only of their subjects.

Owing to changes to the timetable there are now far fewer classes that are split between teachers. This has improved the continuity of learning in these classes and has had a beneficial impact on the progress pupils now make in these groups.

The vast majority of teachers now regularly mark books and follow the academy marking policy. Students are able to show how examples of this have helped them improve their work. Marking in English is now a strength. Teachers give regular feedback to students in order to guide them to make improvements to their work. Students have more opportunities to draft and edit work and, consequently, are developing their reading and writing skills well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved significantly since the last monitoring inspection. The conduct of students both in lessons and around the academy is sensible and mature. They cooperate well with adults and are respectful of each other.

Students agree wholeheartedly that behaviour has improved. Staff are more visible during social times and students are more respectful of the academy environment. For example, there was very little evidence of litter after lunchtime. Lunchtime supervision staff also report that behaviour has improved.

There is still some off-task behaviour in lessons and students continue to demonstrate less positive behaviour with temporary teachers. However, students no longer interrupt others' learning or prevent the lesson from taking place.

Sanctions are now more consistently applied. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly as has the use of the internal exclusion room. This includes those groups of students who were more frequently excluded in the past.

The attendance of students accessing off-site education is checked daily and recorded accurately. The academy robustly checks that their students behave and engage positively in learning at these external providers.

Attendance for students in Years 7 to 11 has improved and is now in line with the national average. However, despite recent initiatives to encourage them to attend regularly, the attendance of students in the sixth form is a cause for concern. On average, they fail to attend the academy for one day each week. This is not adequately preparing them for their next stage of employment, training or education.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of the new Principal has led to a significant shift in the improvement journey of the academy. Staff morale is high. All those who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire praised the current leadership and many stated that they were proud to be members of the academy at this point in its journey.

The Principal has enabled his talented team of assistant Principals to take on full accountability for their areas of leadership. They have risen to the challenge. Collectively, they have built a momentum of improvement that is clearly evident at this inspection. Their impact is now evident through improved teaching, attendance and, importantly, through shared expectations of good behaviour. Monitoring of the quality of teaching is now much more accurate and agreed with inspection findings. This is because leaders are now drawing on a wide range of evidence to evaluate teachers' performance.

Subject leaders are now more involved in monitoring the quality of teaching in their departments. They are growing in confidence in fulfilling the requirements of their role. This is starting to have an impact on learning as the majority of teachers now share leaders' high expectations and know they will be held to account for the progress their classes make.

Governors are a real asset to the academy. They have established a monitoring committee that meets fortnightly during academy time. This combines scrutiny of leaders' reports on academy improvement with on-the-ground monitoring. Records of meetings reflect a high level of challenge and commitment to checking on improvements as they happen. Governors have a very good understanding of the academy's work. The sponsors have worked with the new Principal to embed their statement of action within the academy improvement plan. This is now fit for purpose.

External support

Local authority advisers have supported the academy through conducting a useful behaviour review. This provided leaders with helpful external evidence of improvement and guidance for improving this aspect of the academy's work even further.

Leaders, including governors, have established links with other secondary and primary schools. The subject leaders for English and mathematics have observed practice in Year 6. This has raised expectations. Secondary links are being used effectively to provide external verification of the quality of teaching over time, appraisal and teacher assessment. The link with Saints Peter and Paul Catholic College has proved to be particularly beneficial in supporting the academy in these areas.