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02 July 2010

Mr David Johnson
Principal
Sheffield Park Academy
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Dear Mr Johnson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sheffield Park Academy

Following my visit with Robert Jones and Judy Jones, additional inspectors, to your school on 30 June and 1 July 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures in July 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 academy's adviser at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector





Special measures: monitoring of Sheffield Park Academy

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 30 June – 1 July 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal, associate principal, other staff, groups of students and a representative of the academy's sponsor.

Context

Since the monitoring visit in March 2010, two additional vice-principals have joined the academy. Other appointments have been made to the wider leadership team, including an associate vice-principal to lead and manage the sixth form. A substantial number of new appointments have been secured for September. Year 11 and Year 13 students have finished their examinations and were not present at the time of this monitoring visit.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The academy's assessment data show that it is on track to meet its end of Key Stage 4 target for the proportion of students gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The academy's data point to some improvements in the rate of students' progress. Much work has been done recently to strengthen internal assessment. However, senior leaders recognise that the academy's assessment information is not secure so predictions need to be viewed with caution.

Inspectors' observation of lessons showed that strategies to improve students' basic skills, in particular literacy, do not feature prominently enough. Too often in mainstream classes opportunities are missed to extend students' vocabulary and develop their often weak skills in writing, speaking and presentation. This is a barrier to promoting rapid progress in learning in a school where around a third of students speak English as an additional language, the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is twice that typically found in secondary schools and levels of literacy are below age-related expectations. Teachers have received some training on meeting the needs of different groups, but this has not been embedded into whole-school practice. This limits the rate of progress of these different groups of students.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- increase students' rate of progress in order to raise standards overall and improve their basic skills – inadequate.



Other relevant student outcomes

Behaviour is satisfactory around the academy. A high staff presence on corridors at lesson change-over ensures any incidents are dealt with quickly. In only four of the 39 lessons visited did inspectors observe inadequate behaviour. Teachers' more assertive and consistent application of the behaviour code has contributed to this improvement. Varied tasks that engage students in learning encourage positive attitudes to learning. A small minority of students display more entrenched negative attitudes and on occasion, refuse to comply with their teachers' reasonable requests. A small improvement in overall attendance is evident since the last visit, although it remains low. On the second day of the visit attendance was 87%. On the same day 62 students arrived late for morning lessons; this is too many. The very recently restructured attendance team has made a good start to developing systems to tackle inadequate attendance. Targeted work with a small group of students at risk of becoming persistent absentees has raised their attendance considerably. Sixth form attendance is also showing signs of improvement, as a result of sharper monitoring and higher expectations. Year 12 attendance was 90% on the second day of visit.

Younger students who spoke with inspectors are happy with their experience of school. They say teachers are less tolerant of misbehaviour, but some students still disrupt the learning of others. They feel safe in school and have high aspirations for their futures. Similarly, Year 12 students spoke positively of recent changes. They feel that their views are now taken seriously and welcome the higher expectations already evident. They are enthusiastic about the new opportunities Year 13 will present to take on additional responsibilities within the academy's community and feel well supported to achieve their future aspirations.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve behaviour and relationships through more effective support and guidance – satisfactory
- improve attendance – satisfactory
- enable students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make the progress of which they are capable both academically and in their personal development – inadequate.

The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors observed 14 lessons delivered by teachers who are receiving intensive support or where additional learning support was a feature of the lesson. The quality of teaching and learning was good in two lessons, satisfactory in nine and inadequate in three lessons. Inspectors also dropped briefly into 17 lessons to focus on the pace of learning, students' attitudes and behaviour, and the use of strategies to support different learning needs. The impact of the academy's work to develop teaching quality was evident in the improved pace and range of activities in many lessons observed. Teachers are more confident in managing behaviour and students



are better engaged in learning than on the previous visit. Teachers are keen to improve their practice and to try different approaches to support learning. A weakness of teaching in mainstream lessons, however, is insufficient focus on individual learning needs. Information relating to students' literacy levels and special educational needs and/or disabilities is available to teachers and recorded on lesson plans, but is not used effectively to accelerate the rate of progress of different groups of students.

Changes to management arrangements in the sixth form have had a significant impact. A thorough review of provision has already led to higher expectations, better advice and guidance and stronger collaboration with the sixth form at Sheffield Springs Academy. Inspectors observed eight lessons in the sixth form and found teaching to be good or better in half. In one lesson where teaching was inadequate, learning objectives were not understood by the students and the content was ill-matched to their weak literacy skills.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure lessons offer effective challenge and support for students' different needs by making rigorous use of assessment information – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

New appointments to the wider senior leadership team have added considerably to the academy's capacity to sustain improvement. The added capacity has enabled more detailed and extensive monitoring of provision, the outcomes of which have informed good strategies to increase the effectiveness of provision. Much of this groundwork has informed changes to be implemented in September 2010, for example, to the curriculum. New roles and responsibilities have strengthened the attendance team and improved the quality of advice and guidance in the sixth form. The strategic approach to supporting the individual learning needs of different groups is an area requiring further development if the rate of progress is to accelerate quickly and securely for all groups of learners. Additional capacity is secured for September with the express intention of tackling this key weakness. Staff morale is good. The academy is in a strong position to start the new school year and is on track to meet its target date for the removal of special measures.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- build the capacity to improve by putting in place effective structures for leading and managing at all levels - good
- build the capacity to improve by sharpening the focus of monitoring and making better use of information derived from it to secure a consistent drive for improvement – satisfactory.

External support



The academy sponsor continues to respond quickly to emerging issues. In particular, action taken to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form, using the skills of a United Learning Trust consultant, has had a significant impact in a short time. Progress reports from the National Challenge Advisor and the sponsor provide useful feedback to inform the setting of priorities, for example, in drawing attention to the need for greater security of internal assessment and the slower progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop a whole school strategy to better support individual learning needs, particularly of students with weak basic skills and those who speak English as an additional language.