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Ms E Cropper
Principal
Sheffield Springs Academy
Hurlfield Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S12 2SF

Dear Ms Cropper

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour: monitoring inspection of Sheffield Springs Academy

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Andrew Henderson, additional inspector, and I inspected your academy on 1 February 2012, and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass on our thanks to governors, the sponsor's representative and students and staff who went out of their way to assist us.

There has been some significant instability in leadership and management since the last inspection. A new, acting Principal was appointed on 31 October 2011 following the decision of the previous Principal to leave the academy. Since then, a number of other changes have taken place in the senior team. Two new assistant principals were internally appointed on 31 January 2012 and will take up their posts as soon as possible. The Head of English has recently relinquished management responsibility.

As a result of the inspection on 13 and 14 September 2010, the academy was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time, despite significant development in the last two months, the academy has made inadequate progress in making improvements and the effectiveness of the academy in improving pupils' behaviour is inadequate.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Achievement in 2011 was below the government's floor targets and showed no improvement from the previous year, despite the students in this year group having a higher level of prior attainment. Progress rates in both English and mathematics were well below the national averages. In lessons observed by inspectors, students' basic skills and confidence in learning were low. They were often unclear about the next steps required to improve their work. As a result, few students are able to take responsibility for their own

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progress. Recent action to strengthen senior leadership will provide the opportunity for the academy to regain a focus on improving attainment and enhancing progress, however, at the time of this visit, it was too soon to be able to judge the impact of the new structures.

Achievement in the sixth form in 2011 improved from the previous year. Plans are in place to make some significant adaptations to the sixth-form curriculum from September 2012 to support a wider range of learners than is currently the case.

The quality of teaching

There is clearly some good and excellent teaching at the academy, but inspectors and students agree that there is significant variation, with some that is inadequate. There was little evidence that overall, standards of teaching have improved since the last inspection. Good subject leadership was observed in mathematics, with evidence of some action taken at departmental level to improve the quality and consistency of teaching. Good practice in the use of assessment data to target work at an appropriately challenging level for each individual was observed in this subject. In English, most lessons observed did not provide an appropriate level of challenge for all students, lesson objectives often described what work needed to be completed and did not help students to understand and take ownership of what needed to be learnt. While there is evidence of effective actions to deal with some inadequate teaching, there have been no recent opportunities for groups of staff to collaborate on whole-academy initiatives to improve the quality of teaching. The lack of continuity in senior leadership over the last five and a half years has meant that professional development has often been reactive, with no sustained and high quality improvement focus. Students described both lack of challenge in lessons and insufficient opportunity to be able to explore misunderstanding or misconception. Conversely, one-to-one learning opportunities, where they took place were very highly appreciated. There was a disparity in the perceptions of teaching between students in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The older students described their best teaching as frequently being in core subjects such as English, mathematics and science. Younger students, on the other hand, were much more positive about teaching in practical subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There was considerable evidence that behaviour has improved from a low point in the first half of the autumn term 2011. Concerted whole-academy efforts on behaviour management strategies since November mean that serious misbehaviour is now rare and conduct of students on corridors and around the building is more orderly and very well supervised. Too much learning, however, is still disturbed by inappropriate behaviour. This most usually occurs where the teaching is not suitably challenging or interesting, although students described occasions when even the better teaching was disturbed. Some students expressed

a lack of confidence in the academy's ability to deal effectively with bullying, racism and homophobia. Most felt that inappropriate language was unlikely to be challenged by staff.

Leaders, managers and staff are aware that further improvements in behaviour are necessary and are confident that the improvements established since November last year, can be built upon by the strengthened leadership team.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The long-term improvement of the academy has been substantially impaired by the instability in senior leadership since its establishment in September 2006. The current Principal is the fifth person to occupy the post in five and a half years. As a result, few major improvement initiatives have been able to sustain the quality of development, evaluation and subsequent modification required for lasting impact. The academy's sponsor has been able to provide intensive and high-quality support in response to difficulties such as the departure of a Principal in May 2009 and in the recent change in leadership. A lack of clarity over the split in role and statutory responsibilities between the sponsor and the local governing body, however, has limited the ability of the local governing body to provide the appropriate level of challenge and support. Mechanisms to enable the local governing body to gain an insight into quality of provision in the academy, such as regular visits and discussion with staff, or a clearly available 'whistle blowing' policy, are underdeveloped. New training and guidance for governors issued by the sponsor in January 2012 have begun to address this.

Actions taken by the governing body, sponsor and the new acting Principal since 31 October 2012 have, however, very accurately identified current shortcomings. The sponsor is investing a high level of additional support and stronger links have been made with the local authority. The new acting Principal has taken decisive steps to address weaknesses in senior and middle leadership, although it is far too early to be able to assess their impact. The initial indication, however, is that given some stability in senior leadership, suitable staff have now been appointed to enable significant improvements to be made within the next 12 months.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2010

Key Issue 1:

- Accelerate the pace of learning to raise attainment further by:
 - increasing the proportion of teaching that is good and outstanding
 - tailoring activities to suit the full range of students' learning needs
 - making better use of assessment strategies to support learning.

Key Issue 2:

- Develop students' skills so that they are confident to:
 - take greater responsibility for their learning
 - reflect on their learning and evaluate the next steps that they need to take to improve their work and progress.

Key Issue 3:

- Strengthen the strategic leadership of the sixth form to:
 - provide a clear overview of provision and students' academic outcomes that effectively informs improvement planning
 - maximise the impact of sixth form provision on students' academic outcomes and personal development.