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1 June 2012

Ms N Maytum
Principal
John Madejski Academy
Hartland Road
Reading
RG2 8AF

Dear Ms Maytum

Special measures: monitoring inspection of John Madejski Academy

Following my visit with Pamela Fearnley and Jacqueline Pentlow, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 30–31 May 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed to the sports and humanities faculties and to business education.

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, the Young People's Learning Agency and the Department for Education Academies Advisers' Unit.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Improve the capacity to sustain improvement by:
 - ensuring that provision, particularly teaching, is rigorously monitored, robustly analysed and evaluated against improvements in students' progress and attainment
 - developing a focused and coordinated approach to improving teaching and learning including through sharing of good practice, coaching and mentoring
 - ensuring that improvement plans include rigorous success criteria that are used to check on how well strategies are working
 - extending the capacity of leaders at all levels to manage their areas of responsibility effectively
 - developing the curriculum at all key stages, including the sixth form, so it better meets the needs of students
 - ensuring that the governing body, using accurate information and evaluation, holds all leaders and managers to account and is actively involved in setting the strategic direction of the academy.

- Improve the achievement of all students, across all key stages, particularly in English and mathematics, by eradicating inadequate teaching and significantly improving the proportion of good or better teaching ensuring that:
 - teachers plan lessons that are tailored to meet the different needs and abilities of all students, and monitor students' progress closely to ensure they are fully challenged throughout lessons
 - lessons actively engage and interest students
 - the support in lessons is improved for all lower-attaining students, disabled students and those with special educational needs
 - students' behaviour in lessons is managed consistently.

- Improve students' levels of literacy across the academy by ensuring that:
 - all teachers take responsibility for systematically developing confident and accurate speaking, reading and writing skills in the subjects they teach
 - teachers' marking and assessment pay particular attention to vocabulary, sentence construction, spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - students are given opportunities outside lessons and in tutor time to systematically improve their reading skills and develop an enjoyment of reading.
 - intervention programmes are accurately matched to students' needs.

Special measures: monitoring of John Madejski Academy

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 30–31 May 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, academy leaders, members of staff, groups of students, the Chair and representatives of the Governing Body, and the Academy Sponsor. Students in Year 11 left to begin their examination study leave during the inspection and so their lessons were not observed.

Context

Substantial changes have been made or are planned since the academy went into special measures. The Principal has restructured the senior leadership team, so that just three of the original team of ten remain in post. Five new appointments have been made at Vice Principal or Assistant Principal level, three of whom are due to start later in the current term. New heads of English and science have recently been appointed. Mathematics is under interim leadership at present; a new head of mathematics has been appointed and will take up post in September. Several qualified mathematics teachers have also been appointed to take up positions from September. The academy's administrative function is also being strengthened, with a new finance director already in post, and an experienced human resources manager due to start shortly to assist the Principal with personnel issues associated with the changes to the academy's staff. Of those present when the academy went into special measures, 16 teachers will have left by the end of the academic year. Twenty-three new teachers have been appointed, reflecting a planned increase in the overall staffing level.

The governing body is increasing in size through the recruitment of governors with specific educational expertise and the appointment of additional parent governors. Parent forums have been held to enable parents to communicate their views directly on matters of academy improvement, and a Parent Steering Group is being formed to coordinate activities aimed at listening to the 'parent voice'.

Significant changes have also been made to the academy's curriculum and pastoral structures. Students were formerly part of mixed-age 'vertical' tutor groups which made up separate houses within the academy. Tutor groups are now organised by year group, with lead tutors for each year group taking key pastoral responsibilities and reporting to heads of upper and lower school. Tutor periods are now held at the start of the school day rather than the end. Some subjects have moved away from beginning examination courses at the start of Year 9 to ensure that students first have the correct underpinning skills.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Overall attainment for Year 11 students at GCSE grades A* to C, inclusive of English and mathematics, is set to continue to increase this year. Underpinning this likely improvement is an expectation that English and science results will rise sharply. Mathematics results are expected to be lower this year at GCSE grades A* to C. The proportion of students making expected rates of progress during their time in the academy is set to rise a little in mathematics and by a significant amount in English. However, the academy's GCSE results are expected to continue to be below government floor standards for 2012. Students' learning and progress varies widely in quality between lessons and subjects. For example, students across the attainment range displayed excellent learning skills in a Year 9 level 2 vocational business studies lesson where they were clear about their learning goals and were able to draw independently on a range of resources to achieve their objectives. Students reviewed and improved their work in discussion with their peers and their teacher, and made very strong progress as a result. By contrast, students disengaged from some lessons where they were unclear about the nature or purpose of the work, or found work too easy and the pace too slow.

Students' literacy skills remain a weakness which constrains the quality of their written work and impedes their understanding of the text they read. Nonetheless, programmes which have been put in place by the academy are having a positive impact. Teachers across a number of subjects are now planning systematically to develop and reinforce students' speaking, reading and writing skills. In humanities, students respond particularly well to teachers' effective marking for literacy. The programme which offers over 100 targeted students in Years 7 to 9 specific literacy support during their morning tutor time is a well managed element of a comprehensive programme of literacy interventions. The programme is in its early stages of implementation and has yet to be fully evaluated for impact, but early signs from students' engagement in the morning sessions, and in their enthusiasm for specific reading programmes in English, are encouraging.

In the sixth form, the quality of learning remains variable, as in the main school, but improvements to advice, guidance and support mean that significantly higher proportions of students are on course to pass at A and AS levels this year.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve students' levels of literacy across the academy – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

Teaching quality continues to vary widely across the academy. Particular strengths were seen in sport, humanities, business studies, literacy and the performing arts.

Features of the good or outstanding teaching in these areas included some excellent questioning of students: teachers' questions were distributed around the class, adapted to students' levels of understanding, and probed sensitively to draw from the students explanations or ideas which extended their thinking. Students in these stronger lessons were encouraged to reach higher levels of attainment by working towards clear learning objectives and success criteria, against which they reviewed their own performance or that of their peers. Activities were planned to challenge students to solve problems independently, working within clear timeframes and deadlines.

However, the majority of teaching seen on this inspection was no better than satisfactory, and a small minority was inadequate. Shortcomings remain in ensuring that all groups in the class are suitably challenged and engaged in their learning. Lesson plans generally identify disabled students and those with special educational needs, though they do not systematically identify the more able. Progress has been made in ensuring that many lesson plans now set out different expected learning outcomes for students of different abilities, but too often they do not adapt tasks and activities to suit students' different capabilities. In some cases, teachers do not check enough on students' progress as they work through tasks. As a result, where some find work too difficult or others find it too easy, students can become frustrated and behaviour deteriorates. Some very good work was seen by teaching assistants in supporting aspects of literacy and numeracy, but often their role is not clearly defined by effective planning with the teacher. Students say that aspects of teaching are improving, and they appreciate, in particular, the approach taken by teachers in defining the objectives for each lesson. However, they note that inconsistencies remain between teachers in their expectations and approaches to learning and behaviour. They say that homework is sporadic in a number of subjects, and students' planners are not always used well for organising their learning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the achievement of all students, across all key stages, particularly in English and mathematics, by eradicating inadequate teaching and significantly improving the proportion of good or better teaching – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Although behaviour in lessons is variable, students conduct themselves well around the academy site. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. On the first morning of the inspection, the whole academy took a short walk to the nearby Madejski Stadium to watch the senior boys' soccer team win a national trophy, and were excellent ambassadors for the academy. Staff managed the event very well, with a high regard for student safety and well-being. Students comment that, while some

bullying still occurs, the academy has taken a very active and often successful approach to countering bullying of all kinds, including through good programmes in the new tutor groups. Students' attendance has continued to improve.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

On the basis of rigorous, thorough and accurate evaluation of performance across the academy, the Principal has set out a very clear vision for academy improvement centred on improving teaching, learning and achievement, and building leadership's capacity to improve. She has worked with great energy and determination to reshape the structure and staffing of the academy. Many key leadership positions within the new structure are newly filled or are about to be taken up, and so the impact on the day-to-day work of the academy in addressing inconsistencies of performance has yet to be fully felt. Leaders recognise the central importance of introducing a more comprehensive performance management system, due for introduction next term, to ensure that all staff are fully enabled to play their part in meeting the academy's improvement goals. External consultants have been judiciously deployed to support the leadership of the improvement of teaching and to support and develop subject leadership, particularly in English and mathematics. Through effective programmes of paired lesson observations, they have been successful in ensuring that leaders and teachers are now evaluating the quality of teaching in terms of its success in improving students' learning. Improvement planning for the whole academy is sharply focused on outcomes, but subject improvement plans do not all identify clear and measurable criteria against which success can be evaluated.

Changes to the curriculum are recent and it is too soon to evaluate their full impact. Shortcomings in support for newly qualified teachers, however, have now been addressed, under new leadership, through redesigned programmes of support and wider partnerships. The capacity of the governing body to hold the academy to account has been strengthened with the addition of governors with specific educational expertise. The governing body has been on specific training in the use of educational performance data, and individual governors have worked alongside external consultants, academy leaders and teachers to look at methods for evaluating the quality of teaching. Link roles have now been established between governors and individual departments.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the capacity to sustain improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The academy's action plan is fit for purpose and addresses the key aspects of required improvement well, with realistic targets and timescales for completion. External support has been targeted effectively to key areas for improvement. Innovative approaches have been used to support the development of teaching, including the pairing of academy leaders, governors and classroom teachers with external consultants for classroom observations and subsequent activities. This has successfully shifted the evaluation of effectiveness of teaching from a focus on what the teacher does to how well the students learn. Consultant support has been well-directed to support new or interim subject leadership in English and mathematics, with a particular focus on the effectiveness of intervention programmes to promote better achievement for students in Year 11. The academy is drawing on a wide range of expertise to develop key aspects of its performance, including Reading University to support its literacy programmes and the local authority to develop aspects of the role of governors.