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23 November 2012

Mr Will Thompson
The Headteacher
The Forest Academy
Harbourer Road
Hainault
Ilford
Essex
IG6 3TN

Dear Mr Thompson

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Forest Academy

Following my visit with Angela Corbett Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 21 and 22 November 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 a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher who represents the sponsor, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other members, senior and middle leaders, teachers and students. They took account of 15 responses to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

The Forest Academy converted to become an academy on 1 January 2012. When its predecessor school, Hainault Forest High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require special measures. It is sponsored by Beal High School, which provides the executive headteacher. The headteacher of the academy was the associate headteacher of the predecessor school. Three quarters of the teaching staff are from the predecessor school. The academy has appointed five new middle

leaders and augmented both senior and middle leadership by secondments from the sponsor. The academy places an emphasis on science and sport.

The academy has 912 students on roll, including 153 in the sixth form, and is average in size. Three quarters of the students are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Over a half of students speak a first language other than English, of whom a few in each year group are at early stages of learning English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is almost a half, which is above the national average. The percentage of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is below average, as are the percentages of students supported through school action, school action plus or a statement of special educational needs. The most common special educational needs are behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and speech, language and communication needs. Two thirds of students were at the predecessor school from the beginning of Year 7, so far more students than average have experienced mobility between schools during their secondary education.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Students join the academy with a range of prior attainment that is significantly below average overall and in literacy. The reading support has raised students' levels of literacy and confidence, but many still experience difficulty in understanding everything in lessons and expressing their ideas in writing. Students make good progress in many lessons where teaching is good or better but, in the lessons where teaching requires improvement, students do not learn well enough to meet their targets.

The 2012 Key Stage 4 results show that attainment has risen above that in the predecessor school to close to average overall and in English and mathematics. The gap in attainment between students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and others has narrowed substantially. In English and mathematics, the proportions of students making expected progress and better than expected progress from their different starting points were similar to national figures. There was inconsistency between subjects, with students making below expected progress in design and technology, geography, history, music, drama and some science courses, because the teaching required improvement.

The current Year 11 students started with lower prior attainment. They have challenging targets and are well on the way to meeting them in mathematics, but have some way to go in English and science. A few students in Key Stage 4 study some vocational courses off site, but miss some English and mathematics lessons and some of them are not on track to reach their targets in these subjects.

At Key Stage 3, attainment is below average and too few students who did well at Key Stage 2 reach their targets. In Years 7 and 8, students are making expected progress but, in Year 9, progress is not as fast. Too many Year 9 boys and students known to be eligible for the pupil premium are working below their English targets.

The academy's range of interventions has raised the achievement of White British students, those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium and students who are disabled or have special educational needs. There remain gaps across year groups between the achievement of these groups and other students.

In the sixth form, students' progress improved in 2012 but there were too many failures at AS level and underachievement in science, mathematics, psychology, applied business and photography. The academy has matched current students better to courses to take account of the wide range of their prior attainment. The steps it has taken to improve provision are beginning to make an impact but there remains a need for a rapid rise in students' achievement for students to meet their targets.

The quality of teaching

Lessons observed and discussions with students about their work make it clear that teaching has improved. Students enjoy having more opportunities to work together on practical activities and discuss ideas, both of which have helped them to deepen their understanding when teaching is good. The best teaching seen was carefully planned to meet the needs of all students and challenge them. It was outstanding. It used excellent assessment during lessons and of students' work to help students judge the quality of their own learning and understand precisely how they needed to improve. There are many lessons in which teaching is good and students make at least good progress.

There is too much teaching that requires improvement, and a small amount that is inadequate, so students do not make consistently good progress in lessons. In such lessons, teachers do not customise activities to challenge all students or monitor everyone's understanding during the lesson and adapt their teaching immediately to improve learning. There are too many lessons where collaborative activities are not clearly enough linked to developing understanding of the concepts involved, so students' learning is too superficial. There are also too many lessons where teachers do not give students enough time to do their own work or develop the quality of their writing. This limits the growth of their independence, thinking and creativity.

Teachers use a range of written and visual resources to help students at early stages of learning English with the meanings of words, but there are too many occasions on which students with low levels of literacy are not supported well enough in understanding the key themes of the lesson or developing their writing skills.

Staff use a wide range of approaches to support students who are working below their targets and those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. These include use of early entry for GCSE English and mathematics followed by targeted support in areas of weakness. Students have found that this has raised their confidence. This type of closely targeted teaching needs to be planned for lessons across all year groups to support all students who are falling behind their targets,

including those known to be eligible for the pupil premium. In Year 7, the integrated My World activities help students to develop teamwork skills but do not consistently ensure they are making good progress in curriculum areas relating to the activity.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved. Students helped to draw up the Forest Five guidelines for behaviour, which have contributed to improvements. In many lessons, students are attentive and work hard and teachers use effective methods to help those with behaviour difficulties stay focused. Nevertheless, there are other lessons where some students do not concentrate well and become talkative until teachers apply sanctions.

An external review of behaviour has led to better behaviour in corridors, supported through strong staff presence. Some students are not punctual for lessons, being motivated neither by expectations nor interest in the coming lesson, and need to be urged on by staff.

Students generally treat each other and staff with respect. They say they feel safe and that bullying is dealt with effectively, and parents' questionnaire responses agree with this. Records show a fall in the number of behaviour incidents leading to internal sanctions or exclusions. There are more fixed-term exclusions than average, and the proportions are particularly high for White British students and for students who are disabled or have special educational needs.

The academy's strong focus on attendance and its impact on learning has contributed to a substantial rise in attendance. Gaps are closing between the attendance of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium or who are disabled or have special educational needs and others.

Attendance is still below the national average. Groups with notably lower attendance than others are students who are disabled or have special educational needs, White British students, students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and girls. More students than average are persistently absent.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Leaders have made a positive impact on students' achievement, particularly in Key Stage 4, and on literacy. They have put systems in place that are raising students' progress across the sixth form, but a sharper focus on monitoring and supporting provision is needed to drive up these outcomes more rapidly.

The academy draws effectively on support, which it still requires. But the improvements made and systems in place demonstrate that it has the capacity for continued improvement.

Self-evaluation has identified important weaknesses and informed carefully targeted actions that have brought about improvement in achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance. However, it has been too generous and has not led to a small set of key targets being prioritised then monitored relentlessly.

There are too many actions in development planning and they do not have clear criteria or interim milestones against which their success can be measured or tracked. Consequently, leaders and governors cannot continually monitor the impact of actions and take strategic decisions accordingly.

Governors know the academy's main strengths and weaknesses, and have contributed to improvements where teaching and leadership were weak. However, the precision of challenge they give is limited by the nature of the plans and the large quantity of information they receive.

Plans do not specify clearly enough the actions for improving leadership and management skills. As a result, line managers do not develop well enough the expertise of the people they manage or use performance management to ensure staff have targets that contribute to overall ones.

Staff share a united impetus to improve achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance. The headteacher has distributed leadership responsibilities amongst senior and middle leaders who have produced evaluations and priorities in each subject and pastoral area. These evaluations have identified key areas of weakness, but some are too generous. They do not specify the features of teaching that need improving to raise achievement, such as deepening students' understanding. Targets focus on attaining grade C but not on higher grades or on progress from starting points across year groups, so do not include sufficient challenge for all students.

Staff use a range of data effectively to monitor and support individual students' progress and inform their evaluations. But data are not sharply enough focused on key priorities or used sufficiently perceptively or frequently to provide all leaders and governors with a clear understanding of weaknesses and improvements against targets. Data are not summarised effectively enough to enable leaders and governors to evaluate changes since last year or compare the academy's performance with national data. For example, data for exclusions are not analysed correctly as proportions of each student group so have masked the groups where figures are high.

Leaders have used lesson observations effectively to identify areas for development and improve teaching quality. They provide support to improve the weaker teaching, but the areas for development are not consistently linked to future monitoring or individuals' targets. Sometimes leaders take insufficient account of the progress of all students or of subject-specific weaknesses when evaluating teaching.

External support

The sponsor provides a range of strategic and targeted support, including seconded senior and middle leaders. This is focused on areas of weakness and has already led to improved teaching quality and students' progress. Continued support for the sixth form, science and mathematics is needed to ensure faster improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement so that:
 - across all year groups and subjects the proportions making and exceeding expected progress, given their starting points, match national figures, and gaps between groups of students are narrowed
 - low literacy levels are raised quickly
 - students in the sixth form meet their targets.
- Improve teaching by:
 - ensuring that lessons explicitly deepen students' understanding, through work that challenges them all to think hard, participate actively and develop independence
 - checking everyone's understanding during lessons and responding swiftly to improve students' learning
 - ensuring consistent access for students with low levels of literacy or at early stages of learning English to the key themes of the lesson, and a relentless emphasis across the curriculum on students developing their writing skills
 - leaders using lesson observations to identify the most important areas for development, then focusing support and monitoring on them.
- Develop the expertise of senior and middle leaders so that:
 - they focus relentlessly on a small number of strategic priorities
 - their evaluation is accurate and linked effectively to students' progress
 - they analyse data forensically to identify sharply focused planning targets, each of which has measurable success criteria and clear interim milestones, and monitor progress against them
 - they use rigorous line management and performance management to ensure that all staff are accountable for their contribution to the targets
 - they frequently make separate evaluations of the quality of provision in the sixth form and its impact
 - governors are able to use perceptively summarised data to provide challenge and support.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of Governors or Appropriate Authority and the Academies Advisers Unit, DfE. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Gill Close
Her Majesty's Inspector