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Mrs Kirsten Harrison
Headteacher
Newent Community Academy and Sixth Form Centre
Watery Lane
Newent
Gloucestershire
GL18 1QF

Dear Mrs Harrison

Special measures monitoring inspection of Newent Community Academy and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit with Gary Kirkley and Paul Edwards, additional inspectors, to your academy on 24–25 September 2013, 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2013. 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 we strongly recommend that the academy does not appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) unless I approve the plans to support NQTs during their induction year.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education, the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire and The Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good by making sure that:
 - all teachers make good use of the information from their assessments to plan lessons which match students' needs and levels of ability so all can make good progress
 - students' work is marked regularly to inform and guide their development
 - lessons motivate and engage students so that their interest is maintained and behaviour is good
 - more opportunities are provided for students to work independently.

- Raise the achievement of students of all abilities, particularly the less able and those with special educational needs, so that they make consistently good progress by:
 - making sure that challenging targets are set for all students
 - developing and strengthening students' literacy skills across subjects
 - ensuring teachers fully understand the progress that students are expected to make during their time at the academy
 - ensuring that systems for making checks on students' progress are understood and used consistently by all staff
 - ensuring that the progress achieved by students following college courses is good and sufficient for them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

- Improve the effectiveness and impact of leaders at all levels by:
 - ensuring that leaders, including governors and all staff, understand the difference between attainment and standards and achievement or progress and plan and set targets accordingly
 - developing an accurate understanding of the academy's performance having analysed data on students' progress
 - ensuring that leaders with responsibility for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those on college courses understand and use information about attendance and behaviour and their progress, particularly in English and mathematics, to improve outcomes
 - ensuring that the academy's improvement plans are sufficiently ambitious and that progress is reviewed regularly to determine the impact on students' outcomes
 - using evidence arising from the monitoring of teaching, marking and the feedback given to students to drive further improvement.

- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24–25 September 2013

Evidence

During this inspection, we observed 43 lessons, most accompanied by a senior leader. We met with the headteacher; senior leaders; the full Academy Executive Board (AEB); the National Leader of Education (NLE) who is supporting the academy from the partner school, Deer Park; a group of subject leaders; a group of pastoral leaders; groups of students; and a group of teachers. We evaluated the academy's statement of action and improvement plan, and analysed a number of documents, including plans for changes to the curriculum and the use of pupil premium funds.

Context

Since the previous visit, the governing body has elected four governors to form an Academy Enterprise Board (AEB) which takes on the major functions of the governance of the academy. Six teachers, including a subject leader, started in September.

Achievement of students at the academy

Results from the 2013 GCSE examinations show significant improvements to the progress made by lower-ability students and students with special educational needs who are supported at school action and school action plus. Support for these students across all years has improved. More-effective testing has identified the additional needs for students and then a wide range of strategies, including interventions, are systematically tracked to make sure students achieve well against their targets. Designated staff work well to meet the needs of students with special educational needs, but not all staff are sufficiently skilled in planning to meet the differing needs of the students.

Changes to the curriculum so that lower-ability students get additional time for English and mathematics are increasing the rate at which they progress. Staff who have surplus non-teaching time on their timetables are also being used effectively to provide additional support. Students of lower ability are now making better progress, which is similar to that of middle- and higher-ability students. Teachers are more aware of what good progress looks like for these students. Students are aware of their targets, and these are used well by most staff to give lessons greater challenge and to increase the progress made over time.

Results for GCSE examinations show that students generally achieve well. Students take mainly GCSE examinations with few equivalent courses. They progress from

broadly average standards when they start at the academy to reach standards above average when compared to national figures for students who take mainly GCSE examinations. The proportions of students who make or exceed expected progress in both English and mathematics are in line or above national figures for most starting points. For lower-ability students these results, which were well below average in 2012, have improved, but they are still not in line with national figures. The difference between standards for students who are eligible for the pupil premium and others is below the national figure. On average, the difference is around half a grade for both English and mathematics.

Results for A-level examinations show that students continue to achieve well in the sixth form. Many students were successful at gaining a place to study at their first-choice university, including some to Oxbridge and other highly prestigious universities. Other students were successful at gaining apprenticeships.

Students who attend college for part of their week to study courses in agriculture, animal welfare, construction, motor vehicle maintenance and hairdressing achieve well and many continue with their studies to a higher level when they leave the academy. The academy's system for checking how well these students are progressing is very effective and includes good individual support for students with their written work when they are back in the academy. Staff also use their experiences as part of their lessons. For example, staff asked whether construction students consider environmental issues when they are working at college and linked this to work being covered in the lesson.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved so that now students make better progress in lessons. Teachers have been well supported by training sessions and external support from staff from the partner school. Many teachers have improved their quality of teaching so that more is good or outstanding. However, despite an improving picture, there remains much that requires further improvement as it is not yet good.

Although more lessons are planned to meet the needs of different ability groups within the class, this is not consistent. Some lessons are planned to take account of the differing abilities, but they then do not stretch the most able, and hence not all students make good progress. When teaching and learning are best, staff carefully plan lessons to challenge all groups of students and they use a variety of activities, often giving students responsibility for their own learning. In these lessons, students are challenged, make a very positive contribution to their learning and behaviour is excellent as a consequence. More lessons give students opportunities to work independently.

The quality and regularity of marking have improved. The best marking is detailed and then gives students additional support to improve. Often, this includes an activity which students need to complete either to consolidate what they have learned or to extend them to the next level. However there are examples where marking is poor or books have not been marked so far this term. Subject leaders do not always set a good example and hence they are not in a position to challenge other members of their departments who are not meeting the academy's expectations on planning work for different-ability groups or marking work frequently.

Teachers in all subjects consider aspects of reading and writing during lessons, for example in mathematics, the correct spelling of mathematical language. Students are often encouraged to use discussion to help them prepare for writing and this is helping improve the standards of speaking and listening as well as writing. Drama is also used well. The standards of teaching of the subject are outstanding and students get opportunities to role play in lessons to improve their understanding of characters.

Behaviour and safety of students

Behaviour is improving as lessons became more interesting and engaging so that more students are making a positive contribution to their own learning. There are instances where behaviour falls below the acceptable standard and house leaders then take responsibility for supporting poorly behaved students.

Students say they are aware that bullying occurs. They feel that staff respond well when the incidents are reported. The academy covers all aspects of bullying and related issues on keeping students safe. For example, a drama group presented to younger students about the dangers of sending inappropriate images from mobile phones (sexting). Students have also considered issues around domestic violence.

Students say they feel safe and well cared for, and enjoy the house system. They are delighted with their contributions to their houses and wear their award ribbons with pride.

Attendance for the academy remains broadly in line with the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Senior leaders continue to bring about improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. They have observed a large number of lessons to identify which aspects of teaching they need to develop and improve with individual teachers. They then arrange suitable coaching or opportunities for teachers to visit good practitioners, either within the academy or at the partner school. Staff said they feel the Thursday morning sessions in which colleagues describe aspects of good practice are useful.

They also commented that they find it reassuring that the good practice within the academy is rightly recognised at these sessions.

Senior leaders closely analyse progress information so they have an accurate understanding of the academy's performance and the standards reached by students. They are rightly pleased with the improvements to date but recognise that much more is required. This ambition is incorporated within the academy's development plans. Staff are aware of the challenging targets set for students and the progress students need to make to reach these standards. Pupil premium funds are being used effectively to provide additional support, and to raise the standards of eligible students at a quicker rate than others, and hence reduce the gap in standards to below that found nationally.

The headteacher is well supported by senior colleagues, who are gaining in confidence and being successful in improving the quality of teaching. However, they do not always take enough responsibility for themselves to identify areas which need further improvement, and then plan and implement activities to bring it about.

Subject leadership is variable. Some subject leaders have worked well with their departments. They have observed lessons, identified what needs to be improved and then supported staff to bring about these improvements. Subject leaders then check that the improved practice is part of the staff's normal repertoire of teaching skills. However, other leaders have failed to take responsibility for the standard of teaching within their subject areas. They have not checked how well lessons are being taught or given support and advice on how teaching may be improved. They do not ensure whole-academy expectations on marking and planning lessons to meet the needs of all students are being followed by staff and they do not model good practice themselves.

The leadership of support for disabled students and those with special educational needs has improved and now makes sure support is well matched to students' needs. There is a good overview of students who attend college, with careful checks on how well they are progressing and instant daily feedback on any behaviour or attendance issues. Students who attend college are well prepared. For example, the school provides good careers advice to them and to their parents and carers before they start their courses. Students also attend college for 'taster' days to make sure it is what they expect. A very small number of students attend a work placement for one day each week and this has been effective in meeting these students' particular career aspirations.

The greater focus of the Academy Executive Board has meant they have a better understanding of the work of the academy. Because they rightly have very high expectations, they do not always recognise how well the academy is progressing and do not give suitable credit for improvements which have been made. They have devised a clear plan of what needs to be done to improve the leadership at all levels

within the academy. However, this needs very careful implementation to make sure the positive momentum of improvements achieved does not falter.

External support

The National Leader of Education continues to support academy leaders effectively. The headteacher greatly values the NLE's mentoring, and other leaders and staff have learned from working with leaders and staff from the partner school. Support from Gloucestershire Association of Headteachers (GASH) has also been valuable with financial and personnel issues. The academy also uses support from other local schools and external consultants well.

The academy should now:

- Improve the quality of subject leadership so that it is consistently at least good by making sure all subject leaders:
 - take responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning for their subjects
 - observe staff teaching and then identify which aspects of teaching they need to improve
 - provide support to bring about these improvements and check how well they are embedded
 - model best practice in whole-academy expectations.