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4 October 2013

Mr Russell Heritage  
Executive Principal  
Sheffield Springs Academy  
Hurlfield Road  
Sheffield  
South Yorkshire  
S12 2SF

Dear Mr Heritage

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Sheffield Springs Academy**

Following my visit with Janet Pruchniewicz, Additional Inspector and James Kidd, Additional Inspector to your school on 2 and 3 October 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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.

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 I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint Newly Qualified Teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the School Improvement Board, the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield and as below.

Yours sincerely

Katrina Gueli  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012**

- Ensure the quality of teaching is always good or better, so as to raise attainment and improve students' achievement, including mathematics and especially English, by:
  - taking swift steps to deal with inadequate teaching
  - providing further professional development and targeted support to meet the needs of teachers, especially those who are newly qualified, and checking that this is having a positive impact on their teaching
  - ensuring that teachers take account of what students already know, the progress they have made and their targets when planning lessons in order to match work closely to the full range of students' learning needs
  - ensuring that the tasks and strategies used in lessons interest students and make them keen to learn
  - giving students detailed feedback on how to improve their work
  - improving students' skills in literacy, communication and numeracy so that these are good enough to help them make good progress in all subjects
  - narrowing the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students so that they all achieve equally well, particularly boys and students with special educational needs
  - modifying the curriculum so that it enables all students to achieve well.
  
- Improve behaviour and attendance by:
  - ensuring that all staff follow an agreed strategy for managing students' behaviour so that the low-level misbehaviour and occasional more serious incidents are eradicated
  - ensuring that the recently introduced strategies for improving attendance and reducing persistent absence are implemented effectively so that attendance rises and is at least in line with the national average.
  
- Improve the leadership, management and governance of the academy so that they become fully effective and secure rapid improvements in teaching and outcomes for students by:
  - ensuring that all leaders, especially those who lead and manage subjects, and governors have the knowledge, skills and understanding to carry out their roles effectively
  - academy sponsors ensuring that the capacity to make and sustain substantial improvement over time in all aspects of the academy's work is clearly demonstrable
  - implementing plans for improvement and carefully checking that they are having the intended impact.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 October 2013.**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior and curriculum area leaders, the Chair and another member of the Academy Improvement Board, representatives of the sponsor, four groups of students representing all year groups, and a group of teachers. Inspectors observed 25 part lessons, including two jointly with senior leaders.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, one senior leader has retired, two temporary senior leaders have left the academy and one senior leader has relinquished their responsibility. Eighteen teachers left the academy at the end of the last academic year and 12 teachers joined in September, including a new Curriculum Area Leader for English. None of those who joined are newly qualified teachers.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The proportion of Year 11 students gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics rose significantly in 2013 as a result of stronger teaching and extensive additional support to help students to tackle past underperformance. This improvement enabled the academy to meet the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. Wide gaps between the attainment of Year 11 girls and boys in 2012 narrowed markedly in 2013. However, for other groups, such as students with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children of service families and those looked after by the local authority) although attainment rose compared with their peers in 2012, their progress was not as rapid as others in the academy and gaps in performance widened overall.

Academy data indicate that the attainment of students currently in Year 11 is already higher than that of last year's Year 11 students at the same time. Data also show rates of student progress are improving but this is more evident in English than in mathematics. In part, this is because gaps in students' understanding of number, for example, their mental mathematics skills, are slowing their learning and progress overall. In lessons observed across a range of subjects, students are increasingly making good progress but too often this is still not the case, reducing the pace at which their poor progress lower down the academy is being addressed.

In Year 7, a stronger focus on helping students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills is helping those who enter the academy with attainment that is below that expected for their age to catch up so they are better placed to access the full curriculum. Teachers in all subjects are increasingly incorporating strategies to help students develop their literacy skills but academy leaders rightly recognise that more needs to be done in this respect.

## **The quality of teaching**

Extensive professional development and new appointments are resulting in a steadily improving profile of teaching quality across the academy. Good teaching was observed in just over half of the lessons observed during the monitoring inspection but inadequate teaching stubbornly persists. While many teachers have responded well to the support they have received to improve their teaching, others are not consistently demonstrating better quality practice.

Where teaching is at its best it is typified by high expectations for students' attainment and productivity, activities are well matched to the needs of different students and approaches successfully interest and motivate students to learn well and at a brisk pace. Teachers also use questioning to check students' understanding carefully and encourage them to think and work things out for themselves. In some classrooms, teachers are promoting students' social and moral development very well and this is leading to improved behaviour. Less effective teaching is too common. Here, teachers expect too little of students, fail to capture their interest or allow too little time for students to learn for themselves because their teacher talk takes up too much of the lesson. As a result, students make slower progress and their attitudes to learning are less positive.

Leaders' focus on improving the frequency with which students' work is marked and the quality of feedback they receive is beginning to bear fruit. In books scrutinised, there was much greater consistency in the approach to marking and the regularity with which work was being marked. However, academy leaders have rightly identified that the quality of feedback in helping students to improve their work remains much more variable.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour across the academy has continued to improve since the last monitoring inspection. Incidents of poor behaviour and internal truancy continue to decline and the number of positive referrals is increasing. The introduction of rewards and prizes for good behaviour is helping to motivate students to have more positive attitudes to learning and each other. The extensive support for students who find meeting the academy's expectations for behaviour difficult is helping to bring about improvement. Nevertheless, students interviewed and the academy's leaders remain concerned that low-level disruption is still a barrier to good learning and progress in too many lessons. While teachers are typically ready to start students' learning promptly at the beginning of a lesson, some students are slow to embark on tasks set because they have developed poor learning habits and low motivation levels over time.

The continued drive to improve attendance is having a marked effect and specific work with individuals is reducing the proportion of students with high levels of absence. Punctuality has also been monitored more closely this term and strategies, such as prompt closure of the gates and the requirement for students arriving after this time to enter via the main entrance, has led to a significant reduction in the number of students arriving late.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Stability at senior leadership level and effective action designed to secure sustainable improvement are beginning to raise standards, improve students' behaviour and attendance, and tackle significant weaknesses in the quality of teaching and the curriculum. Nevertheless, senior leaders are acutely aware that although recent improvements are to be

celebrated, the academy still has a long way to go. Leaders of subjects have a much better understanding of student performance and the urgent priorities for improvement within their respective curriculum areas. Staff interviewed were very positive about the support and professional development they have received; they felt this was meeting their needs effectively and leading to improvements in their practice. The tracking of student achievement is more robust with a greater emphasis being placed on accelerating progress in all year groups. Targets set for students are more challenging and underperformance is being tackled more effectively through the use of strategies such as intervention and student mentoring. Academy-wide changes, such as the launch of a new behaviour policy, are being carefully introduced to ensure messages are clear and consistency in their application is achieved.

Improvements to the curriculum have ensured the needs of students in Year 7 are more closely met and that at Key Stage 4 students are more likely to gain qualifications that will support their progression into education, training or employment at the end of Year 11. The 'Springs Board' transition project which started in Year 6 and has continued into Year 7 has been well-received by students. It is effectively helping them to develop their literacy, historical, geographical and information and communication technology skills while providing a settling learning experience to successfully bridge the transition between primary and secondary school.

The School Improvement Board is challenging academy leaders effectively but is also focused on securing the long-term development of the academy's local governing body. While removal from 'special measures' is an immediate priority for all those involved with the academy, a longer-term, strategic plan for continued and sustainable improvement is currently being developed.

### **External support**

The academy's sponsor continues to work closely with the senior leaders and the School Improvement Board to ensure the academy's priorities for improvement are addressed in an effective and sustainable way. For example, the sponsor has brokered support from a charity to work with students who are most vulnerable to underachievement; this is having a positive impact on attendance and helping to improve their personal, social, emotional and academic outcomes. Wider partnerships with local universities and other institutions are being increasingly used to enhance the curriculum and raise student aspirations.