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4 April 2014

Mr Neil Hutchinson
Headteacher
Richard Rose Central Academy
Victoria Place
Carlisle
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Dear Mr Hutchinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Central Academy

Following my visit with Andrew Henderson and Clive Petts, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 2 and 3 April 2014, 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 third 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 I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers in departments where there are permanent subject leaders.

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 and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better by ensuring that:
 - inadequate teaching is rapidly eradicated
 - all teachers have high expectations of students and use the information they have about their attainment to set work that is challenging for all abilities
 - students are given clear, regular and helpful feedback on their work and the level at which they are working so they understand how to improve
 - teachers apply the academy's behaviour policy consistently in lessons and ensure that all students know what is expected of them.

- Raise standards, especially in English, mathematics and science, by consistently using and meeting targets based on students making at least three levels of progress between Years 7 and 11.

- Improve attendance in all year groups, including in the sixth form, so that it is at least in line with the national average.

- Improve the impact of the academy's leaders by:
 - ensuring that governors, senior and middle leaders are more actively involved in evaluating the academy's work and respond rapidly to the priorities for improvement
 - ensuring that action plans are sharply focused on the most urgent priorities, and that the academy's progress in tackling them is checked frequently and rigorously.

- Governors must improve the quality of their work by:
 - ensuring that they have a thorough understanding of whether the work done to improve the academy's performance is making any difference
 - supporting leaders in ensuring that all teachers are held responsible for the progress of the students they teach and are provided with appropriate training to help them improve their teaching
 - ensuring that pupil premium funding has a positive impact on the achievement of students for whom it is intended
 - taking part and responding to an external review of governance to identify what support and training governors need.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 April 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Executive Principal, a representative of the School Improvement Board and United Learning, Chair of the Local Governing Body, teachers and groups of students. They observed teaching in a range of subjects and scrutinised students' work in English and mathematics.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit a permanent headteacher has been appointed. The previous acting headteacher has been appointed as senior deputy headteacher. Nine teaching staff have left the academy and five have joined. The academy is currently going through a staffing and leadership restructure.

United Learning has not yet taken full control as sponsor. The proposed date for legal transfer is June 2014, with full transfer planned for 1 September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Students' achievement shows improvement since the last visit. GCSE results are predicted to rise in the next two years and leaders are carrying out detailed assessments to make sure students stay on track. Leaders are confident that assessments are more accurate than the previous year's overly optimistic projections; assessments have been checked thoroughly, with support from external consultants and subject specialists.

Students' progress is tracked carefully and increasingly accurately in all year groups. Tracking shows that progress has quickened for most student groups, including in the sixth form. However, there are still wide gaps between the achievement of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and others in the academy. Students who are making less progress than expected are now being identified early and given appropriate support lower down the academy. Students in Years 10 and 11 are being supported effectively to fill gaps in their English and mathematical knowledge and develop examination techniques. These interventions are helping students to catch up more rapidly.

The majority of students are making expected progress in English. In mathematics, students have made quicker progress in the last six months, but inadequate teaching in the past has slowed their progress over time. Students' progress in science is still weak, because issues in the quality of teaching and with recruitment of specialist teachers have not been resolved fully. The majority of students take care with their work and finish the work they are set. Students made good progress in about two-thirds of the lessons seen, which is consistent with the academy's analysis.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved. Teaching staff are working extremely hard and have raised their expectations of what students can achieve. Inadequate teaching is being eradicated through targeted support and recruitment of new staff. Challenges still remain, due to difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers, especially in mathematics and science.

Lessons are better structured to give students opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills to longer pieces of work. Lesson planning is supported by detailed data on students' progress, although this information is used with varying success. Where it is used well, teachers plan activities that build on students' knowledge and skills from lesson to lesson. Where teaching is most successful, as seen in history for example, teachers make learning relevant because they take account of students' interests, experiences and prior learning. Where teaching is less effective, insufficient account is taken of the range of ability in the class. The most able students are not challenged sufficiently and questioning does not probe and extend students' understanding. Marking is used most effectively in English, where it supports students in redrafting and improving their written work. Useful feedback is given in mathematics, but it is not always acted on by students. The support plans for students with special educational needs and those supported by the pupil premium have been reviewed and are more effective, because they are focused on how teachers can support improvement.

There is a more consistent approach to application of the behaviour policy giving students a clearer understanding of the expectations for their behaviour in lessons. The introduction of the 'good neighbour' approach, where students complete their work in a neighbouring class if they are disrupting learning, helps to defuse situations before they develop into a confrontation. However, students feel there are still occasions when the behaviour policy is not applied strictly enough and a few students are allowed to disrupt learning in certain classes.

Teaching in the sixth form shows the same strengths and weaknesses as teaching across the rest of the academy. Students feel there have been many improvements, but are concerned about the quality of teaching in science. Some students feel that they do not receive sufficient advice and guidance about UCAS applications, funding streams and sixth-form opportunities.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour in lessons shows significant improvement since the last monitoring visit. The behaviour log shows that the number of demerits or exclusions from lessons has reduced in the last three months. Students confirm this, reporting that fewer lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. However, a small minority of students still disrupt learning in certain classes, especially at Key Stage 3, where relationships between the teacher and students are not constructive. Students say this happens less often than it used to. The vast majority of students show respect for their teachers and want to get on with their work. However, levels of commitment and engagement in lessons are still highly variable.

There is a calm and orderly atmosphere as students arrive, with sensible use of the cafeteria and library. Students have welcomed the move by the new headteacher to 'meet and greet' them as they arrive. They appreciate the presence and accessibility of staff around the academy. Routines for moving around the building are well established. Punctuality to lessons has improved with the introduction of music to signal the start of lessons and during movement times. Students are sociable and friendly and say they feel safe. Students say that bullying is not a concern and records confirm that there are few recorded incidents of bullying.

The use of internal inclusion facilities has been rationalised. This is beginning to have a positive impact in reducing the extent to which students are removed from lessons. However, the way in which incidents are logged and followed up lacks clarity, particularly when students are removed to neighbouring classes. Fixed-term exclusions from the academy have reduced in the last three months. There has been an improvement in attendance over the last three months and compared with the same period last year.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Senior leadership has been strengthened with the appointment of a permanent headteacher who has extensive experience of improving schools. He has established a high profile in the academy; students are positive about the appointment and feel there is a purposeful atmosphere. The senior leadership team has been re-structured to make the best use of expertise. Staff have been through many restructures, which inevitably affects morale, but they remain committed to securing improvements. Senior leaders and governors have a very clear overview of the improvements needed and the challenges. Improvement planning is focused on the right priorities and there have been several further revisions to key policies. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of changes on students' outcomes in examinations, but there are indications that the academy is moving in the right direction.

Senior leaders evaluate teaching accurately and provide helpful feedback and professional development to support teachers to improve their practice. The establishment of the 'teaching and learning group' is providing further opportunities to develop successful approaches. Leaders are clear about the areas requiring further improvement in teaching, namely: to make sure students of different ability are suitably challenged and supported in lessons; to develop questioning to probe and extend students' understanding; to support students to develop more positive attitudes to learning and engage more in lessons. Middle leaders are developing skills to check progress and the quality of teaching in their subject areas through paired observations. Newly qualified teachers receive good support in departments where there are permanent subject leaders; there is scope to support further appointments in these departments.

Governance continues to provide academy leaders with good challenge. School Improvement Board members have a good range of expertise and are well informed. A Local Governing Body has now been established. It too has a good range of expertise and it also has representation from the local community. There are suitable plans to transfer more powers to the local governing body over the next year.

External support

Academy leaders have developed links with local schools to support professional development and the moderation of assessments. These are proving helpful. The future new sponsor, United Learning, continues to provide effective consultant support to improve teaching in English and mathematics.