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8 October 2014

Sarah Wilson  
Acting Principal  
Sawtry Community College  
Fen Lane  
Sawtry  
Huntingdon  
PE28 5TQ

Dear Mrs Wilson

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Sawtry Community College**

Following my visit with Helen Booth and Chris Ingate, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 6–7 October 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement 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.
- The academy development plan is fit for purpose.
- The academy may 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 Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency, the Academies Advisers Unit and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2014**

- Urgently ensure all safeguarding and health and safety requirements are fully met.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring self-evaluation is firmly based on the impact of actions taken by all leaders on the quality of provision, outcomes and leadership
  - ensuring the governing body is effective in meeting its statutory duties
  - ensuring all members of the governing body are given training to support them in questioning and challenging the judgements of senior leaders and in using a wide range of evidence in order to be convinced of the academy's effectiveness
  - ensuring senior leaders have robust procedures in place to track and evaluate the support provided for students who need additional support
  - improving staff morale and ensuring that they all feel fully supported in all aspects of their work.
- Raise overall achievement by:
  - embedding the systems for setting targets for students and tracking their progress towards those targets
  - ensuring the remaining gaps between the achievement of different groups in the academy close.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - extending to all subjects the good practice that has successfully raised achievement in English, mathematics and science
  - improving teachers' skills in questioning students so that all make good progress in lessons
  - developing teachers' skills in communicating what students will learn so they better understand the aims and purpose of each activity
  - ensuring teachers provide sufficient challenge for students in their work
  - ensuring the good practice that has developed in marking in some subject areas becomes standard practice across the academy.
- Improve the behaviour and safety of students by:
  - improving the systems for recording and monitoring the progress and welfare of vulnerable students
  - providing all staff with the help they need to apply the behaviour policy consistently, including reporting incidents
  - sharpening the work on preventing bullying so that students not only understand the issues, but also how to deal with the effects and all students are confident that by reporting bullying incidents these will be tackled
  - improving attendance, including the systems for alerting parents when children are absent.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6–7 October 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Acting Principal, senior leaders, two governor representatives including the Chair of the Governing Body, several groups of students, a group of teachers and a group of non-teaching staff, and the Executive Principal of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust.

### **Context**

There have been wholesale changes in leadership and governance since the inspection, and a significant turnover in staff, particularly in mathematics and science. The Principal has left the academy, the Vice Principal is on long-term absence and the Deputy Principal has stepped down. Sixteen teachers left at the end of the summer term and 13 new staff took up teaching appointments at the start of September. Half of the governors have resigned from the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair. The governing body hopes to fill five vacancies shortly, including the election of two staff governors.

The academy has been subject to numerous external reviews and audits since the inspection in June. These include two local authority safeguarding reviews, an inspection from the Department for Education, a financial investigation by the Education Funding Agency, an external review of governance and an external review of the academy's use of its pupil premium funding.

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

Results in the most recent GCSE examinations in 2014 showed some improvement when compared with the previous year. The proportion of students gaining at least five A\* to C grade GCSEs (including English and mathematics) rose to 62% from 58%. The proportion of students making or exceeding expected progress improved in English, but fell slightly in mathematics. The gender attainment gap remains wide, with girls outperforming boys. On the other hand, the attainment gap between disadvantaged students (those eligible for pupil premium funding) and their classmates narrowed markedly.

Achievement in the sixth form was good in 2014. Sixth-form students achieved well because their results, overall, represented good progress from their respective starting points.

It is too early in the academic year to analyse assessment and progress data to discern any improvement in students' progress. However, scrutiny of students' work and observations of learning in lessons across the academy indicate that the quality of learning is patchy, particularly in subjects such as mathematics where there has been a high turnover of staff. Pupils were seen to be making good progress in their learning in some lessons, but in others the quality and pace of learning were inhibited by weaknesses in teaching, particularly a lack of challenge.

The academy's work to embed students' targets to help drive improvement is still in an early stage. Too many students are unaware of their potential in the subjects they are studying and said that they would be happy with a C grade, when they should be aspiring for higher. In contrast, in a Year 7 lesson, the teacher's assumption that students would study mathematics at A level was a subtle way of embedding high expectations and bolstering their self-image as able mathematicians.

### **The quality of teaching**

In the recent inspection, teaching was judged to require improvement rather than being inadequate, and there has been little time to implement major changes since then. Nonetheless, a new procedure for managing behaviour has been introduced, and common expectations of marking have been agreed. Evidence from this visit is encouraging. Students say that they like the stepped sequence of sanctions and, although they commented that there is some inconsistency in their application, they say it is a better way of setting clear expectations in each lesson. Students also appreciate the more detailed feedback they receive through marking. Teachers are working hard on this, and at its best there is a constructive dialogue that steers improvement and raises students' expectations of what they can achieve.

Notwithstanding these improvements, the quality of teaching is uneven because there is too much variation in teachers' expectations of what students will achieve, how hard they will work and how they will behave. In a few lessons, teachers took too long to settle their class and permitted too much idle chatter throughout. Although teachers have essential information on the prior attainment of the students in their teaching groups, they do not always use this to set suitably difficult work, and the support of teaching assistants was too often unplanned. This means that students sometimes repeat work they had done in previous years, without any obvious extension, or occasionally opt to do lower-level tasks because they are easy.

Improving teachers' skills in questioning is a key priority. Clever questioning was at the heart of the effective learning seen in some lessons, particularly in the sixth form where teachers used their specialist knowledge to explore and deepen students' learning. Elsewhere, however, questioning was not used skilfully to check students' understanding or extend their learning. This meant that students were able to keep

their heads down and avoid exerting themselves, and questioning did little to pick up the pace of learning. Some teachers had simple but effective ways to check that all students understood key points before moving on: the mini-whiteboards in students' planners were used well in one lesson, while in another a simple 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' helpfully indicated the students' confidence in grasping a new concept.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The academy has rightly made students' safety its top priority. Senior leaders have worked swiftly to ensure that all the correct procedures and reporting systems are in place to check the safety and well-being of students, particularly any who are vulnerable. Inspectors spoke to many students of different ages, ranging from new Year 7 students to sixth-form students who had been at the academy for more than six years. All said that they feel safe in school. They know what constitutes bullying, and its different guises, and recognise the risks associated with using the internet. Issues are discussed openly; a skilfully-led session for Year 9 students on the risks of social media encouraged an excellent discussion on issues such as cyber bullying and the risks posed by 'sexting'. Students say they feel able to share any concerns or anxieties with their friends or with adults, although not all are confident that staff will resolve issues. The high profile and approachability of senior leaders around the academy have contributed to the students' sense of well-being and safety.

Most students conduct themselves well. They are polite and considerate with one another and treat visitors with respect. At times, however, students do not modify their behaviour appropriately. The wet and windy conditions exacerbated students' liveliness, but their boisterousness spilled over into public areas, such as the foyer, corridors and lunch hall. In lessons, students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are sometimes exemplary and often positive, but this is too often not the case. On occasions, students took too long to settle, or chatted when they should have been working, and disrupted the learning of others. The indifference that some older students show to their learning is linked with their low self-confidence in some subjects.

Attendance shows no signs of improvement. Attendance rates for the month of September are no better than in the same period in 2013, particularly for Year 11.

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

The Acting Principal has galvanised staff and created a cohesive and effective senior leadership team. This team has done a remarkable job, in a very short time, in establishing new ways of working and ensuring that procedures and policies are updated and communicated to staff. Staff show confidence in senior leaders and acknowledge that the team has worked 'flat out' to turn things around. Staff morale is remarkably positive, given the upheavals at the end of last term and the uncertainties about the future.

The academy development plan has been suitably strengthened, with a simpler 'seven point plan' that is much more usable for leaders and governors. Planned actions have been sensibly prioritised, although much of the early work has necessarily focused on setting up systems for communicating and recording information and monitoring performance. Safeguarding procedures have been tightened and training is planned for all staff. The everyday work of the academy is routinely monitored with learning walks to review the quality of learning and standards of behaviour.

Establishing effective governance has been a considerable challenge in the void left by the previous leadership. The newly elected Chair of the Governing Body has worked hard, with the residual core of seven governors, to establish basic operational procedures and instate policies and systems that enable the governing body to meet its statutory requirements and function effectively. Governors have previously had no induction, training or correct documentation, but a recent audit indicates that they have a set of useful and complementary skills to bring to their role. The priority has been establishing clear lines of communication between governors, staff and parents, and instituting regular meetings with suitable agendas and accurate minutes. The imminent appointment of a new clerk and election of new governors, including staff governors, will bolster the capacity of the governing body. Training is planned.

Plans for the transition to sponsored academy status have been actively pursued with the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust as the preferred sponsor.

### **External support**

Leaders and managers, including governors, have recognised the urgent need for external guidance because the academy had not previously sought or received external support of any note. External reviews have highlighted shortcomings in provision and procedures, and provided clear guidance on what needs to be done, often in the form of specific stipulations. The academy has not had time to implement the recommendations of these reviews, so their impact is minimal.

The Acting Principal now benefits from regular mentoring from a consultant headteacher, and leadership support has been freely available from the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust. Senior leaders have, for example, taken the opportunity to observe good practice at other schools. In addition, the governing body has received valuable support and guidance on legal and personnel matters from external agencies, including clear guidance from Peterborough Governor Services.