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13 November 2014

Mr Showk Badat
The Principal
Gloucester Academy
Painswick Road
Gloucester
GL4 6RN

Dear Mr Badat

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gloucester Academy

Following my visit with Joseph Skivington, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 11 and 12 November 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 April 2014. 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 into the mathematics department because departmental leadership is not secure.

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 Interim Advisory Board, the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education, the Education Funding Agency and the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely
Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2014

- Raise achievement by improving teaching to good or better levels across the academy ensuring that:
 - teachers demand higher standards of work from their students during lessons and in the written tasks they set
 - students' work is accurately assessed and that new work planned enables them to make good or better progress
 - students' work is marked regularly with comments that help students to improve their work and increase the progress they make
 - the progress made by different groups of students is checked regularly against the quality of teaching they receive.
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels on raising students' achievement, particularly that of the most able, by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders have the capacity to deliver improvement priorities
 - checking that the information on students' progress is accurate in all subjects and staff are clear about the capabilities of each student
 - checking that students who are eligible for the government's pupil premium funding receive high calibre support that meets their specific needs
 - promoting literacy skills in all subjects across the academy
 - ensuring that the governing body holds the senior leaders and managers to account for all aspects of the academy's performance.
- Improve behaviour and students' attitudes to learning by:
 - making sure all staff and students understand and adhere to the academy's procedures for managing behaviour
 - ensuring students are engaged productively in lessons and participate actively in their learning

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how it can be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and three members of the governing body. Discussions were held with seven leaders directly responsible for implementing the post-inspection action plan and the teachers responsible for implementing the curriculum in Year 7. Discussions were held with groups of students formally and during lessons to ascertain their views on learning, behaviour and safety. Academy progress data were reviewed. The single central record was checked. Inspectors visited 23 part lessons with the vice-principal and the assistant principal responsible for teachers' professional development. The inspectors reviewed students' work in mathematics, and a selection of work from Year 7 students.

Context

The future sponsorship of the academy remains uncertain. The Principal anticipates that a decision is likely on the future sponsor in February 2015. Prospects Academies Trust, with the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education, appointed a replacement Chair of Governors three weeks before this second monitoring inspection. The governing body is in a transition towards full delegated responsibility. Prospects Academies Trust remains the responsible body.

Achievement

The rise from 27% of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*- to C, including English and mathematics, in 2013 to 38 % in 2014 reflects significant improvement, particularly in English. The proportion of students reaching a C grade or better in English improved. There is a highly effective strategy for accelerating students' reading and writing skills across the academy. The academy has responded quickly to train adults to support the intervention programmes. Students' speaking skills are improving rapidly where this is a main focus of lessons. This is particularly the case for those students in Year 7 who are taught a discrete unit called opinion making and oracy. More widely, standard English is not practised enough by students and teachers' expectations in this aspect of students' communication skills are not high enough.

Students' achievement in mathematics is inadequate. The progress made by the students who took their GCSE was significantly lower than that expected nationally. The proportions reaching a C grade or above in last year's examination did not improve, and the academy's aspirational targets for mathematics were not met.

Until very recently there was no coherent strategy to raise achievement in mathematics across the academy. This is being rectified.

The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and that of others is negligible in the subjects they study. The use of the pupil premium funds to subsidise uniform and purchase resources for these students in subjects such as catering has improved their achievement and attitude to learning. There is a strong correlation between the use of the funds to support disadvantaged students in English and their good progress in the 2014 GCSEs.

Historically, teacher assessments have not been accurate. The first set of assessments from each subject has now been collected, but moderation and ratification have not happened. Teachers have not yet moderated the assessments of the skills students require to be effective learners, and thereby accelerate their progress. Evidence from inspection indicates these learning skills improve rapidly where teaching is good or better.

A sample of Year 7 students' work shows some excellent gains in students' writing to express complex ideas. The four topics, known as rich tasks, each provide plenty of opportunity for writing. The writing skills students require are dovetailed well into their regular English lessons. Students who were behind with their reading are catching up quickly as a result of the sound training, reading club and precision reading interventions.

The quality of teaching

Teaching and learning are improving but they are still patchy.

Learning in mathematics lessons is often poor. Teachers are not clear about what they expect the students to learn. Students are often confused in lessons because they are not guided to use their previous skills in a new situation. On occasions, teachers' weak mathematical knowledge baffles students further. The teachers do not listen enough to students during discussions and do not recognise and tackle misunderstandings. Those students who have grasped mathematical concepts and are capable of accurately answering questions in workbooks are not challenged either to apply these skills or deepen their understanding during the lesson. The students' response to weak teaching is poorly presented and incomplete work.

The teaching in other subjects is now on a more secure footing. There are strong elements such as step-by-step planning that is aligned to each student's needs. The teachers have a strong rapport and enthusiasm that inspires students to learn. In these situations, students apply intellectual effort to master the skills and extend their knowledge.

In other subjects, teachers' expectations of students are not challenging the more able. Often the tasks given to these students repeat knowledge and skills already secured. In part this is because teachers do not know what students already know and therefore cannot take them forward. For example, there is often only limited discussion in the lesson to help teachers' appraise students' knowledge and skills.

Some marking is vague and irregular and does not help students improve their work. Students' art, English and science work is annotated with formative comments that reflect on the progress the student is making. The marking conveys a real sense that the teacher understands the abilities of the students and is confidently steering them to achieve more.

Teachers' application of the academy's framework for tracking students' learning abilities, known as 'shines', is particularly strong in Year 7. Some teachers refer to the seven 'shines' regularly during lessons and this helps students use them to improve their work. Other teachers are less comfortable in using the framework. Whilst they may draw attention to the 'shines' once at the start of the lesson, they are not using them as a prop to encourage students to think about how they are learning, and improve their work. This uncertainty also undermines the accuracy of teachers' assessment of students' cognitive skills.

Students report that teaching is much better and they are learning well. They consider teachers are more enthusiastic and helpful. Students are unanimous that there is little disruption to learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There has been a marked improvement in students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Students get on with learning in lessons without being disrupted.

Students are managing their own behaviour well. They arrive at the academy smartly dressed, enthusiastic and keen. They move promptly to lessons. Lateness is becoming a thing of the past. They have the tools they need to learn with and are happy to answer questions as and when they are directed to them. They signalled their determination to commit to improving their behaviour through a powerful expression of respect for the minute silence to mark Armistice Day.

Attendance has been stable at 93%. This is well short of the 97% target. Efforts to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence are costly on the academy's financial and human resources. However, there is no let up in the academy's efforts to target the 126 students who are persistently absent. Excluded students and those in alternative provision are closely monitored for attendance. Inspectors are assured that the academy is doing all it can to reduce persistent absences.

Whilst the vast majority of students behave well, the number of fixed term exclusions is high. Slightly lower than last year, the numbers reflect the zero tolerance practised by the academy.

The academy is using a variety of strategies to manage behaviour effectively and keep students safe. Rewards for endeavour are broadcasted for all to see. This raises students' self-esteem and self-worth. Students are treated with maturity and report that their views are now being responded to. They enjoy the meet and greet

at the start of the day. They say this action and their link with one 'significant' adult helps them feel safe.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal has stabilised the academy by providing clarity of purpose and relentless focus on learning. Staff morale is high. Staff and students have confidence in his leadership. The Principal continues to inject ambition and has astutely used the staff talents to lead and manage change.

A significant adjustment to the curriculum in Year 7 has allowed staff greater flexibility to design how subject knowledge and skills are taught. There is a prominence given to equipping the students with skills to help them manage their own learning. The students have responded by always working hard. Training and staff development are improving teachers' skills in this methodology and helping teachers think deeply about how students learn.

Subject leaders are also working together to tackle the deficit in reading skills. The nomination of a significant adult to oversee the welfare of a small group of students has resulted in greater collaboration between staff, and more staff have a stake in students' success.

Academy leaders now hold teachers to account for the quality of their work, underpinned with support through training. A robust professional development programme to re-skill teachers and tackle weak teaching is well underway. Checks on teaching are undertaken by a small group of senior leaders, which provide a consistent message about high expectations. Staff have responded well. Students have picked up on this by raising their own expectations.

Academy leaders and governors account effectively for the additional income provided to disadvantaged students by senior leaders. They regularly review the impact of this spending on students' academic skills and behaviours.

The Principal and assistant principal have put together a team of eight governors that represent the local community. They have had one meeting. The governors have the appropriate experience and show enthusiasm and commitment. They are in regular contact with the academy to observe and discuss the progress of the post-Ofsted action plan. Governors use their expertise in overseeing safeguarding procedures and securing financial probity. Despite not having a clear structures, they are beginning to challenge and hold the academy to account for its actions.

External support

The sponsor has not fulfilled its responsibilities to support and challenge the academy. Governance is not on a secure footing and the interim advisory board has not provided the Principal and leaders with appropriate challenge or scrutiny.

The Principal has brokered links with successful local schools, the Crypt and Pates, and the teaching school Balcarras, to inject skills where these are lacking. It is too early in the programme to evaluate the impact of this partnership.

Priorities for further improvement

- Sponsors must work rapidly to place governance on a secure platform. Terms of reference, and roles and responsibilities must be clarified as soon as possible so that the academy can be held to account. The sponsor's role in providing tangible support for the post-Ofsted action plan must now be made clear.