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John Sheppard  
The Hereford Academy  
Marlbrook Road  
Redhill  
Hereford  
HR2 7NG

Dear Mr Sheppard

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Hereford Academy**

Following my visit with Robert Steed, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19–20 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 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 November 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 school 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 NQTs in the mathematics department.

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 and the Department for Education Academies Advisers' Unit.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013**

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
  - teachers provide lesson activities that cater for different ability levels, so that all groups of students make good progress
  - marking of students' books shows them clearly what they need to do to improve their work
  - teachers use questioning well to check students' understanding and provide support and challenge where they are most needed
  - leaders of subjects raise teachers' expectations and secure improvements
  - senior leaders provide support and training to enable subject leaders to more effectively identify, monitor, support and challenge weak practice.
  
- Improve the achievement of all students, particularly in English and mathematics, so that it is at least in line with national levels by ensuring that:
  - students' progress is assessed accurately
  - the resulting information is used by all leaders, managers and teachers to identify when groups, classes or year groups are not making good progress, and to plan for improvements in teaching and achievement in a focused way
  - the spending of the pupil premium funding results in the attainment gap between students eligible for the funding and other students in the academy being narrowed.
  
- Those responsible for governance and leaders at all levels should develop a highly focused development plan which:
  - is founded on an accurate analysis of current performance
  - includes specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited targets
  - makes it clear what key individuals must do to drive improvements at a much faster rate.

Ofsted has made recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 19–20 November 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, academy leaders, members of staff, groups of students, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, and the director of education of the sponsor.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, the academy has now formally become part of the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust. This is a diocesan multi-academy trust, currently comprised of two primary schools and The Hereford Academy. Two governors have left the local governing body. The leadership review has been implemented and a new leadership structure set in place. A deputy principal has left the school and one assistant principal was not successful in obtaining a post within the new leadership structure. Four teachers have left the school; two in mathematics, one in English and one in food technology. Three teachers are new to the school; one in mathematics, one in English, and one in food technology.

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

Unvalidated GCSE results for 2014 present a mixed picture. Headline overall results of five GCSEs at grades A\*–C (or equivalent) inclusive of English and mathematics fell sharply and are now below the government's floor standard for attainment. This partly reflects new national methods of calculating this measure to give greater weight to academic subjects, which have adversely affected results at an academy where students often follow a number of applied or vocational courses. Purely academic attainment, in terms of GCSE results only, improved slightly overall. Mathematics results, however, fell markedly, reflecting the poor progress of students over time which took the school into special measures. Girls performed especially poorly. Of particular concern was the wide difference between the results teachers had forecast in GCSE mathematics and actual outcomes. While assessment and moderation arrangements across the academy have generally strengthened, the lack of accuracy of forecasting data in mathematics and a minority of other subjects undermines the ability of leaders to pinpoint and address underachievement. Scrutiny of the accuracy of assessment and forecasting in mathematics by external subject specialists would give leaders greater confidence to challenge underachievement and poor performance.

By contrast, forecasts of a substantial improvement in GCSE results in English turned out to be very accurate. Results matched the national average in attainment at grade C and above, and in the proportions of students making expected progress. This reflects rapidly improving teaching and learning in English, and much sharper tracking of students' progress that enable successful interventions to tackle

underachievement where required. Disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium therefore made similar progress to other students in the school and all students nationally in English. In mathematics, the progress of disadvantaged students was also similar to that of others in the school, though both groups were well behind progress made by students nationally.

Across other subjects too Year 11 results in 2014 were variable. There were marked improvements in modern foreign languages, and students did well in art, business studies, catering, drama, health and social care, music and sport. However results declined in previously successful areas of science and humanities. Such variations continue to be reflected in current learning and progress across the academy. There is a steady overall improvement as teachers in more subjects such as English and technology are beginning to match the excellent assessment and planning practices that exist, for example, in art and sport. There is an urgent need now to ensure that students in all classes are taught well, to make at least the progress expected of them. The academy's successful drive to improve students' literacy continues to make a positive contribution to supporting students' progress in all subjects. Students' reading ages are improving, and their books are increasingly well organised and better presented, with more evidence of students writing effectively for a range of purposes in all subjects.

### **The quality of teaching**

Improvements in a number of key aspects of teaching are supporting better overall progress for current cohorts of students in the academy, but improvement continues to be constrained by weaknesses in teachers' planning which persist in some classes. In subjects such as art and sport, and increasingly in English, teachers make exceptionally effective use of assessment information to set students clear short- and longer-term achievement targets which promote high expectations for students across the attainment range. In these subjects, lessons are tightly planned to use time effectively to realise precise objectives which clearly support all students in making strong progress. There remain, however, too many instances in lessons across the academy where teachers' planning is very loose and lacks urgency in accelerating the progress of students, some of whom are working below the levels they should as a legacy of underachievement. In these lessons, more-able students are not challenged to work in sufficient depth and sometimes become bored and restless. There are also instances of less-able students lacking sufficiently well-structured support to help them understand. In mathematics, valuable work has been done by the interim subject leadership to enable teachers to share effective practice. However, while overall improvement is evident, mathematics lessons vary widely in the effectiveness of their planning and the urgency of their pace.

Students are full of praise for the quality of teachers' marking, which, alongside the support given for their own self- or peer-assessment, is showing them clearly how to improve. Students are responding increasingly well, and improving both the content

and organisation of their work. Teachers have focused effectively on promoting students' literacy and language skills in their marking, which has been particularly valued by students for whom English is an additional language. Teachers make good use of the high-quality accommodation and resources available to them to design learning activities that are enjoyable and engaging. Their questioning of students remains a strength, particularly in ensuring that all students make a contribution to class discussions and are confident to ask for help, either from a peer or the teacher, when needed.

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

The academy's work to keep students safe, including those whose well-being is most vulnerable, remains very effective. Students value the ready accessibility of staff and leaders to deal with any problems they might have. Students' attendance for the last academic year was in line with the national average. Students continue to behave courteously around the school site. Behaviour in lessons is most often good, although individual students become restless when the pace of learning is slow. Students say that teachers generally manage behaviour fairly and well, although some teachers move too quickly to higher-level sanctions such as detentions without using earlier warnings.

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

Following the leadership review, leadership responsibilities within the academy are now better defined to give leaders at all levels more direct accountability for improvement in students' progress. Processes have been set in place, through class 'scorecards' and 'ready reckoners', to ensure that the excellent presentations of data on students' attainment and progress should now be actively used by each curriculum area, and each member of staff, to compare current outcomes with those expected and intervene to address underachievement. Weekly departmental meeting times are now used to ensure that teaching staff in all curriculum areas are collaborating in the planning of schemes of work and the moderation of assessments. These are important steps forward in building capacity in an academy where too often in the past, in some departments, teachers worked in isolation. However, the roll-out of these improvements to the point where all staff are consistently using assessment information well in their planning has been overly cautious. The impact of these changes has therefore still been too weak in too many classes. There is now an urgent need for senior and middle leaders to quicken the pace of implementation of their plans to ensure that assessment information is used effectively to plan lessons and schemes that secure rapid progress for all groups of students.

The academy's self-evaluation is broadly accurate and draws well on a range of monitoring information. It clearly identifies the key priorities for academy improvement, especially in terms of students' achievement. It rightly celebrates the

continued strengthening of many aspects of the academy's ethos, including in the promotion of equalities by becoming a 'No Prejudice School'.

The resolution of arrangements over the academy's sponsorship has taken some time and created some uncertainty around delegated authority for the academy's governance. Nonetheless, governors have continued to scrutinise the quality of education, and to monitor academy improvement including through the work of the governors' action group. They value the high quality of information they receive on students' progress. The governing body retains a strong degree of education expertise, but is now seeking to replace two members with financial expertise who recently stepped down.

### **External support**

The academy has continued to draw successfully on the support of its independent school improvement adviser, whose work in promoting peer observation among staff has been effective in breaking down barriers and promoting collaboration and good practice. It is too early to judge the effects of the new sponsorship arrangements on academy improvement. The sponsor is, however, aware of the urgent need for external subject specialist support and challenge, particularly in the accuracy and use of assessment information, to be made available to the mathematics department. Planned school-to-school links to support improvements in mathematics did not materialise as hoped; a new link has now been established with an outstanding academy in Sandwell, which it is anticipated will yield more benefits over time.