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Mr Mike Smith
Principal
Queen Elizabeth's Academy
Chesterfield Road South
Mansfield
NG19 7AP

Dear Mr Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Queen Elizabeth's Academy

Following my visit with Nigel Boyd, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 21–22 April 2015, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

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 Chief Executive of the Schools Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA), the Chair of the Education Advisory Board (EAB), the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, the Chair of the Queen Elizabeth Trust, the Academies Advisers' Unit and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely
Julia Wright

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate variations in students' achievement in English and mathematics by robustly improving the weakest teaching in these subjects.
- Improve the consistency of teaching so that all lessons secure at least good progress for all groups of students and encourage them to develop good attitudes to learning by:
 - making sure that all teachers use all the information they have about their students' previous learning to plan lessons and activities that will meet their needs
 - increasing the opportunities for students to think and find things out for themselves in lessons
 - giving students more chances to develop, apply and reinforce their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.
- Rapidly improve the attendance of all students across the academy, so that it is at least in line with the national average.
- Improve the achievement of those students in the sixth form who are undertaking academic qualifications and increase the opportunities all students have to develop their employability skills.
- Strengthen the capacity of leadership and management at all levels to sustain improvement by:
 - developing the skills of subject leaders so that they take full responsibility for improving the quality of teaching in their departments
 - strengthening the analysis of information about students' progress in English and mathematics to support leaders and governors in checking on how well different groups of students are doing across all year groups
 - making the quality of academy self-evaluation and planning more accurate and realistic, so that there is a much clearer picture of the actions and milestones required in order for the academy to be judged good by July 2015.
- Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the academy. An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 21–22 April 2015

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documents including the academy improvement plan and self-evaluation summary, academy information about students' predicted achievement in 2015, minutes of a recent Education Advisory Board (EAB) meeting and a sample of students' books in science and mathematics. They met with the Principal, the Vice Principal, members of the senior leadership team, the head of sixth form, five subject leaders, two representatives of the Schools Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA) and the Chair of the EAB. Inspectors also met with two groups of students. Inspectors observed students' learning in 14 parts of lessons, five of which were seen jointly with members of the senior team. An inspector visited the academy's off-site provider for work-related learning.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, no new permanent staff have joined the academy. An Associate Assistant Principal, with responsibility for teaching, has been recruited internally.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Information provided by the academy shows that more of the current Year 11 students are on track to achieve five GCSEs including English and mathematics at the end of this year. Leaders predict that students' progress in both English and mathematics will move closer to national averages. The data also show that in mathematics, the proportion of students exceeding nationally expected progress will also improve. Leaders have taken appropriate steps to increase the rigour of procedures to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments in English, mathematics and science. Leaders predict that students taking three GCSEs in science will achieve above national averages. However, the students taking GCSE additional science are predicted to have made much less progress than they should. Inspectors noted that in the sample of science books seen, students were not making enough progress.

The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and others is predicted to narrow further to approximately two-thirds of a GCSE grade in both English and mathematics in 2015. However, the attainment of disadvantaged students remains too low compared to other students nationally, particularly in mathematics. Too few of the disabled students and those who have special educational needs are predicted to achieve as well as they should by the end of Year 11. Data provided by the academy show that the achievement of vulnerable students is comparatively stronger in Years 7, 8 and 9. Boys achieve less well than girls in English, mathematics and science.

The head of sixth form chairs a sixth form 'task force' of teachers to identify students who are at risk of underachieving and provide them with appropriate support. This strategy is starting to be effective. Data provided by the academy show that there are likely to be improvements in students' overall attainment at both AS- and A-level, particularly at the higher grades, in 2015. Students who have not previously achieved at least a grade C in GCSE English or mathematics will resit the exam this year and the majority are predicted to improve their grades.

The quality of teaching

The academy's leaders took swift action, following the last inspection, to address inconsistencies in teaching. They established a set of 'non-negotiable' expectations for teachers, which include the use of appropriate questioning and a focus on literacy in all lessons. Leaders have started to implement effective monitoring activities, supported by targeted training. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving. More teachers use information about students' attainment and progress to help them plan learning in lessons. Teachers are starting to use questioning more effectively to challenge students of different abilities. Some teachers plan a variety of activities for students, but do not always direct them towards the activity that would best suit their learning needs. Often students take the easiest option and make less progress as a result. Teachers do not always fully consider the needs of disadvantaged students and those who speak English as an additional language. As a result, they make less progress than they should.

Students' attitudes to learning are variable, particularly in science, where teaching is weakest. On occasion, students are lethargic and get away with doing very little in lessons. Teachers do not always plan group work effectively; some students do not contribute and therefore make insufficient progress. Where learning is weakest, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are simply not high enough.

Teachers now take more opportunities to develop students' literacy skills, and particularly their use of key words. In one lesson, the teacher patiently coaxed some lower ability students to use correct subject terminology. When they could not remember words, she encouraged them to use their booklets to help them. This allowed students to find the information for themselves and led to high levels of engagement. Inspectors noted that the quality of written work produced by boys in mathematics and science frequently lacked care, and teachers did not always address their literacy errors. In addition, students' mathematical skills are not sufficiently well developed. Teachers do not insist that mathematical diagrams are drawn correctly, using rulers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' attendance is below national averages and has fallen since last year. Attendance in the sixth form has improved. The proportion of students who are

regularly absent has increased. Leaders have introduced a more robust system for monitoring attendance, but this has not proved effective.

Teachers are starting to use the academy behaviour policy far more consistently than before, although a number of staff say that inconsistencies remain and inspectors agree. Students have a suitable awareness of the different forms of bullying. Bullying is rare and when an incident occurs, staff deal with it effectively. Students behave well around the academy site and are polite and respectful. An appropriate number of staff supervise at lunch and break times and the atmosphere is calm. Sixth form students wear 'business dress', including suits, and they are clear that this helps them prepare for working life.

Leaders' strategies to improve behaviour are starting to make a difference; the number of recorded incidents of poor behaviour is reducing. Fixed-term exclusions are very low. Students who have specific behavioural needs are catered for well. The attendance and behaviour of those who attend the learning inclusion centre (LIC) are improving. Twelve students in Years 10 and 11 attend appropriate off-site, work-related courses. The academy's leaders make regular checks on their attendance and progress.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Principal took immediate action following the inspection in January. He has rightly put the focus back on improving teaching. The staff training day in February was described by several staff as a 'pivotal moment'. At this training, the Principal set out his minimum expectations for good teaching. Consequently, teaching is starting to improve. The training day also included a session with subject leaders about their responsibilities in their subject areas. He introduced a shared format for subject leaders to check on the quality of teaching in their subjects, and enhanced their role in lesson observations. The majority of subject leaders now have a different mind-set; they are well focused and have much greater accountability. Leaders' judgements of the quality of teaching are now drawn from a wide range of evidence including lesson observations, work sampling and visits to lessons to focus on students' attitudes to learning. Leaders' evaluation of teaching is increasingly accurate and informs the training opportunities that are offered to staff. Therefore I strongly recommend that the academy only appoints two newly qualified teachers in any subject except science.

The academy takes effective action to promote students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development through activities such as the pupil parliament and links with a school abroad. The single central record meets statutory requirements.

The special educational needs coordinator has introduced a new system for assigning teaching assistants to mentor all eligible students. This is starting to have a positive impact on the behaviour, attendance and progress of some of the disabled students and those who have special educational needs, particularly in Key Stage 3.

The head of sixth form has benefited from support given by the Vice Principal and the school improvement adviser from SPTA. As a result, she is increasingly effective in her role. She has a far sharper focus on students' achievement and is not afraid to take action to ensure that the quality of teaching in A-level subjects is maintained. She has developed an accurate self-evaluation and this has served to improve her understanding of the key issues that need addressing to support further improvement. Appropriate opportunities for work experience are available to support sixth form students, particularly those on work-related courses. The head of sixth form has developed the curriculum and it now includes an appropriate employability skills qualification. Students also have opportunities to learn about potential risks to their well-being and safety. The majority of students value these opportunities to prepare them for their working lives.

The Chair of the EAB has a keen understanding of the issues facing the academy's leaders. She is a frequent visitor to the academy. She and other governors now have an opportunity to participate in interviews with students that serve to promote their understanding of specific subjects. Leaders provide EAB members with accurate and timely data. This allows governors to challenge them effectively about students' progress and attendance.

External support

The regional director and the academy improvement officer from SPTA are rightly conscious of the need to help leaders build sustainability and capacity in the future. They provide support in a variety of ways. The academy improvement officer has worked with the head of sixth form to develop a more accurate self-evaluation summary. SPTA has also supported the academy to commission the work of a science consultant, who has a clear understanding of the issues affecting the science department.

The school should take further action to:

- Improve the quality of provision in science to enable all students to make the progress that they should.