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

Dear Mr Sheppard

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Hereford Academy

Following my visit with Alun Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Suha Ahmad, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8–9 July 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth 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 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 Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education Academies Advisers' Unit.

Yours sincerely
Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]

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 fifth monitoring inspection on 8–9 July 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, checked students' books and listened to students read. They held discussions with the principal, academy leaders, members of staff, groups of students, a group of parents, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, and the chief executive of the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust. At the time of this inspection, students in Years 11 and 13 had left the academy and students in Year 10 were out on work experience placements.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, a new head of mathematics has taken up post, and the mathematics department is now fully staffed with specialists. Five teachers will be leaving the academy at the end of term, including two science teachers and the head of science. The local governing body has successfully recruited new members, and an election is being held for a vacant parent governor role.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Across the academy, students' learning and progress have improved strongly during the last academic year. Gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and others have generally narrowed. The sharp rise in standards in nearly all subjects is demonstrated in the greater fluency of students' writing, and in their much higher confidence in solving problems and contributing ideas to class discussions. Such improvements have been underpinned by much better standards of literacy. Academy leaders have implemented highly successful programmes to improve students' reading and writing. As a result, students read regularly in school, and accurate assessments help to ensure that they get well-focused reading support when they need it. Measured reading ages have risen strongly. Teachers in all subjects consistently reinforce high expectations for the quality of students' writing, so that students' spelling, punctuation and grammar have improved markedly. Students now regularly and systematically use dictionaries and thesauruses to help them spell and to enrich their vocabulary. In extended written pieces, higher- and middle-attaining students, in particular, understand how to use evidence to explain the points they are making, and the need to weigh conflicting evidence to come to a conclusion. Until recently, too few of the more-able students had made the accelerated progress of which they are capable. However, evidence is clearly emerging in Key Stage 3 from the answers of more-able students that they are responding very well to the higher expectations for breadth and depth placed upon them by their teachers, particularly in English and humanities.

Standards in mathematics are rising quickly across the academy in response to higher expectations and a much more demanding assessment framework which uses GCSE questions across all year groups. As a result, a Year 9 top set was observed

coping well with advanced questions on the sine rule that students might normally be expected to answer towards the end of a GCSE course. Surveys of students' views show that students now have a high regard for mathematics. GCSE results in the subject for Year 11 students are on course to improve sharply in 2015 on those of the year previously. Nonetheless, mathematics GCSE results are likely to be well below the national average for attainment and students' progress, reflecting the legacy of extensive underachievement that took the academy into special measures. Science GCSE results are predicted to fall further in 2015, and to be below those in other subjects at grades A* to C. However, overall GCSE attainment is set to rise. Parents speak very favourably of the time that teachers gave to Year 11 students, including after school and on weekends, to support their learning in the approach to the GCSE examinations.

Outcomes and the quality of provision for students in the sixth form have strengthened since the last Section 5 inspection. Leaders have rationalised and reorganised the curriculum to build on the academy's strengths in vocational provision. Well-managed work placements and an increasingly effective resit programme for those yet to attain a grade C or above in English and mathematics contribute to clear occupational pathways for those on Level 2 or Level 3 vocational courses. As a result, retention rates have improved markedly and are now in line with national averages. Nearly all students successfully move into further or higher education, employment or training destinations. The range of academic courses on offer is small and students' progress on them has been uneven, but they are valued by students who like the secure and supportive approach of the academy, or who wish to add an academic course to their vocational programmes.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has continued to improve. Teachers have built on the strengths and successfully addressed the weaknesses identified at the last monitoring inspection. In particular, teachers in all subjects across the academy are now rigorous and effective in their promotion of students' literacy skills. They mark students' work with close attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar; students are required to make corrections and improve against clear literacy targets. Students are given clear guidance in how to approach pieces of extended writing to ensure that they apply their knowledge well and evaluate evidence effectively. While a minority of students in some classes are reluctant to speak in whole-class discussions, teachers' questioning is increasingly effective in encouraging students to contribute their ideas. Just occasionally, students need more feedback and guidance in speaking clearly to the whole class or reading aloud. Students work constructively and collaborate well in solving problems when working in small groups.

Teachers across the academy are now systematically planning lessons that offer tasks well matched to the different abilities of students in their classes. These tasks are planned effectively to ensure that more-able students are applying higher-order

skills, or deepening and extending their knowledge, rather than doing 'more of the same'. Teachers know their students very well; the information on achievement, attitudes and behaviour in the 'context sheets' for each class is used well to plan work and support students' progress in lessons. Students vulnerable to underachievement, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children, disabled students, those who have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language, are well-supported in and out of class. The Learning Support Department is highly regarded by students and their parents. Intervention programmes for vulnerable students are evaluated clearly to ensure that they are successful, and so attainment gaps across the academy are narrowing. Teaching assistants have benefited from effective training, and work well with teachers in providing focused support to individuals and groups.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy's systems to keep students safe are generally well developed and very well managed. Parents spoke very highly of the comprehensive provision for care and support for students whose achievement or well-being was vulnerable. Students and their parents told inspectors that the academy responded swiftly and effectively to resolve bullying incidents. However, the curriculum for sex and relationships education is weak and does not educate students early enough about relationships, sexual risk and contraception.

Most students behave well in lessons and around the academy site; they get on well with their peers and their teachers. Attendance is slightly lower this year than last but still close to average. Students are punctual to school and to lessons, and punctuality continues to improve.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Able supported by the senior leadership team, the principal has successfully raised expectations for the quality of teaching and learning across the academy. These expectations are reinforced by comprehensive monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment by both senior and middle leaders. Teachers and teaching assistants have responded well and implemented the academy's policies with great consistency; for example, on marking and lesson planning. Teachers told inspectors how much of an improvement they could see in students' books and teaching quality: 'It is a world apart from where we were 12 months ago', said one.

The current development plan has been used well to drive improvements in key areas and to measure success against all actions at key points in time. Leaders have drafted a new development plan to take the academy further forward. The plan is well designed to address all key areas for further improvement, including those set out in the last Section 5 inspection report, and to reshape the curriculum. It also includes a section on further improvements to the effectiveness of the local

governing body, especially through engagement with the school. The development plan sets out clear success criteria based on students' progress targets, and the formulation of these targets is now set out clearly so they should be well understood by all. Leaders are nonetheless aware that the targets need to be kept under review to ensure that they are always appropriately challenging.

The new draft development plan acknowledges the need to strengthen the curriculum for religious education and for personal, social, health, and economic and citizenship education. Too many of these aspects are missing from the curriculum for most year groups in the academy. As a result, the academy's curriculum does not currently meet statutory requirements or the terms of its funding agreement for religious education. The consequence is that many students have a poorly developed understanding of different faiths and cultures in the United Kingdom and beyond. They also have a limited understanding of British democratic institutions and the rule of law. In these respects, at present, the curriculum is not preparing students well enough for life in modern Britain.

Under the astute leadership of the Chair of the Local Governing Body, governance has continued to strengthen. To find out more about teaching and learning, governors now accompany senior leaders on lesson visits to look at students' learning and scrutinise their books. Governors are playing an increasingly active role in 'visioning' the long-term future of the academy; for example, through their involvement in the new 'strategy team' of governors and senior leaders, and through a visit by the Chair with the principal and sponsor to a good school in Stoke-on-Trent in similar socio-economic context.

External support

The Bishop Anthony Educational Trust has continued to develop its improvement work with the academy. Its chief executive has promoted a link, beginning at senior leader and governor level, with the Ormiston Sir Stanley Matthews Academy in Stoke-on-Trent. This is a school whose students come from similar backgrounds to The Hereford Academy, and the visit has already promoted ideas about further ways of improving standards. The Trust has now also appointed a Head of Learning and Achievement who will be based for part of the week in the academy in a monitoring and advisory role.

The current external school improvement adviser has continued to provide very effective support for many aspects of teaching, learning and curriculum development across the academy.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that students are well prepared for life in modern Britain by:
 - implementing a programme of high-quality religious education for all years in the academy
 - developing further activities that introduce students to the cultural and faith diversity of communities across the United Kingdom
 - strengthening students' understanding of British democracy and the rule of law
 - providing students with an effective programme of sex and relationships education from Year 7 onwards.