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Ms Yvonne Jones  
Executive Headteacher  
The Forest High School  
Causeway Road  
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Gloucestershire  
GL14 2AZ

Dear Ms Jones

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Forest High School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 December 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 recent section 5 inspection. Please also pass my thanks on to the pupils and members of staff I met during my visit. I was very impressed by their positive approach to my visit in the last week of a long academy term.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2015.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

#### **The academy's leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

The South Gloucestershire and Stroud (SGS) Academy Trust, the Chair of the Local Governing Body and the Executive Headteacher have created a clear vision and plan for the future of this academy. Since September 2015, the Executive Headteacher, supported by other senior leaders, has put in place many of the systems and procedures that are essential for the smooth running of the academy. Many of these did not previously exist or were ineffective. At the time of this visit, these changes have not yet had a measurable impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement. It is essential that, by the time of the second monitoring visit, much more rapid improvement is visible.

#### **The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.**

**The academy's action plan is fit for purpose.**

**Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.**

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of the SGS Academy Trust, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students' achievement accelerates across all subjects, by making sure that:
  - all inadequate teaching is eliminated
  - teachers use information about what students can do to plan work that is at the right level of challenge for different abilities
  - teachers' assessment of students' work is accurate so that underachievement can be identified and tackled
  - teachers' questioning is used to assess students' learning and progress, to challenge and develop students' thinking and to deepen their understanding
  - teachers' marking gives students a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve, and that teachers check that students have improved their work as a result of the advice they have given
  - students practise their writing skills in different subjects
  - pupils use their mathematical skills and knowledge to solve problems across different subjects
  - students' behaviour is managed consistently well, so that poor behaviour is not tolerated and all teachers take swift action to prevent learning being disrupted.
  
- Raise achievement in all subjects by making sure that:
  - all students, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, make the progress they should
  - the achievement of disadvantaged students in the academy improves so that the gap between their achievement and the achievement of other students nationally is closed
  - boys' achievement improves so that the gap in achievement between boys and girls is closed
  - the most-able students make at least good progress and achieve well.
  
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - assessment data are accurate across all subjects
  - leaders make more effective use of additional government funding to narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and others in the academy and nationally
  - leaders set out clear guidelines on the teaching of literacy and numeracy across subjects
  - subject leaders are held to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their areas of responsibility
  - the curriculum more effectively reflects the different abilities of students and that it better supports students' achievement in English, mathematics and science

- leaders at all levels insist on staff applying academy policies consistently, particularly for marking and behaviour.

An external review of the academy's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 December 2015**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Executive Headteacher, the headteacher and other senior leaders, the Chief Executive Officer of the South Gloucestershire and Stroud (SGS) Academy Trust, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, subject leaders, key stage progress leaders, other teachers and pupils. The Trust's statement of action and milestone plan, and the academy's improvement plan, were evaluated. The inspector observed a wide range of lessons together with the academy's senior leaders. In these lessons, the inspector looked at pupils' work and talked to them about it in order to evaluate current achievement information.

### **Context**

The Forest High School has been sponsored by the SGS Academy Trust since March 2015; the Executive Headteacher took up her post on 1 May 2015. The academy was previously sponsored by E-ACT. The academy has been working with Pate's Grammar School as an improvement partner for about the same period of time, although less formal arrangements started a little earlier.

In September 2015, apart from one assistant headteacher, a completely new senior leadership team took up their posts, including the new headteacher. There have also been changes to subject leadership and more changes are planned. The new roles of key stage progress leaders have been created during this autumn term. Other staffing changes have also taken place.

The external review of the academy's use of pupil premium has been undertaken and this aspect of leadership and management has been improved

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Since September 2015, the academy's senior leaders have introduced many of the basic systems and procedures required to make the academy run effectively. However, these changes have not yet had measurable impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement.

The Executive Headteacher, working with the SGS Academy Trust and the Chair of the Local Governing Body, provides exceptionally strong leadership and has given other senior leaders clear direction for the improvement of the academy. She is relentless in driving, and increasing the pace of, these improvements. However, she is still having to undertake too much of the day-to-day work required to improve the academy quickly. The Executive Headteacher is supported well by the two senior leaders of learning and teaching and the assistant headteacher responsible for the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils.

Since September 2015, senior leaders have introduced many of the essential systems and approaches that previously either did not exist or did not work effectively, such as:

- a process of departmental and subject improvement planning to reflect both the overall academy improvement plan and subject priorities
- monitoring pupils' progress frequently and effectively
- ensuring the reliability and accuracy of assessment information
- evaluating the quality of teaching through its impact on pupils' progress and achievement by frequent and systematic checking of pupils' work, observations of teaching and analysing assessment information
- involving governors in gathering first-hand information about pupils' achievement through tightly-focused reviews of pupils' work, following the good training they received to ensure that they can do this well, to back up their analysis of assessment information
- making sure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs, ensures that they can be successful in examinations and prepares them well for their next steps
- establishing the basic elements of lesson planning to help teachers improve this key aspect of their work
- establishing expectations for teachers checking and giving pupils feedback on the quality of their work and guidance on how to improve it
- introducing the roles of key stage progress leaders
- clarifying the academy's behaviour policy
- setting up a parents' forum and arrangements to communicate with parents, and gather their views, frequently.

Senior leaders have significantly improved the culture in the school for pupils and teachers. Teachers are gaining an increasing understanding of what is not good enough and the need for improvements to be rapid and deeply embedded. Senior leaders have boosted teachers' confidence and morale. The 'fear of failure' has been removed and teachers are more ready to indicate when they need help. A good programme of coaching and support has been introduced to develop key teaching skills. This programme has a good balance of whole-academy improvements and individual support and development. Senior leaders are carefully evaluating the impact of this training for teachers and agree that it is not yet having the effect required. If this training does not quickly lead to the expected improvements in the quality of teaching, leaders will introduce targeted individual support plans, with a view to using formal capability procedures if these are not effective.

While teachers accept this change in culture, many are not yet ready to take individual responsibility for improving their practice. There is still a sense that some teachers do not fully appreciate the full extent of the improvements required. Pupils also value highly the changes that senior leaders have made. However, many pupils also need to recognise that the comfortable, 'low expectations' culture that previously existed has gone and they need to 'up their game'. The attitudes

expressed so well by the group of pupils I met needs to become more widespread; they told me 'the one thing that would improve this school is for teachers to push us harder and support us so that we can do better'.

The report on the inspection in May 2015 judged subject leadership in the academy to be inadequate. Overall, this is still the case. These weaknesses in subject leadership significantly reduce the capacity of the academy to improve rapidly enough. This is fully recognised by senior leaders and improving the situation is a key priority and a matter of some urgency. Some existing subject leaders, such as in English, have the potential to develop and become more effective. This is currently not the case in, for example, mathematics and science. A new head of mathematics will take up post in January 2016. Further changes to the leadership of a range of other subjects have already taken place or are planned. A programme of support for subject leaders has been introduced, but, at this early stage, has not yet had the necessary impact.

By the time of the next visit, subject leaders must:

- have undertaken a detailed and rigorous review of progress against the actions in the departmental improvement plan
- have an up-to-date and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in the subjects they lead
- be absolutely clear about the further improvements required and how these will be achieved and progress monitored and evaluated.

By the time of the next visit, senior leaders must ensure that:

- departmental improvements plans are of the high quality required
- progress against these plans has been rigorously monitored and evaluated
- appropriate actions have been taken to improve the quality of teaching as a result of this monitoring and evaluation.

There is much more capacity to secure the improvements required elsewhere in the middle leadership team. The academy's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is beginning to equip teachers with the information and skills they need to ensure that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make better progress in lessons. A recent external review of the provision for these pupils has provided useful points for further improvements. The two key stage progress leaders, one for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and one for Years 10 and 11, are also growing into the role well. They are beginning to balance their understanding of each pupil's background and personal circumstances with information from the six-weekly progress checks to ensure that all are appropriately supported to enable them to do well.

Parents are better informed about the changes being made through regular parents' briefings and meetings. Their views are gathered frequently and valued; they are informed well about any actions taken.

Ensuring that the academy's safeguarding arrangements met all statutory requirements and were completely up to date was a priority for the new leaders. This has been completed and the arrangements are now effective. Pupils say that they feel safe and are well cared for. They behave safely in lessons and around the academy. However, leaders and teachers are making the best they can of an extremely uninspiring and shabby environment, for example by making very good use of displays of pupils' artwork around the buildings and displays of pupils' work in classrooms. The academy buildings, classrooms and other spaces do not stimulate pupils to want to do well. There is a limit to what can be achieved with brightly coloured paint! Some parts of the outdoor spaces need attention, such as repairing loose and broken paving and marking steps more clearly.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching was judged to be inadequate in the inspection in May 2015. The academy's leaders judge that too much teaching is still inadequate. This monitoring visit confirmed that the majority of teaching is inadequate, including in English, mathematics and science as well as in other subjects. The weaknesses in teaching are often a result of inadequate subject leadership, exacerbated by the previously inadequate senior leadership that failed to give clear direction and set high enough standards.

Teachers' expectations for the quality of pupils' work are far too low. When pupils are challenged to work at a higher level, they are not given the support needed or do not have the knowledge and skills to respond well.

The current senior leaders fully understand that dramatically improving the quality of teaching is fundamental to raising pupils' achievement and improving the overall quality of the academy. They have already instigated an extensive coaching and training programme to support the development of skills in planning, teaching and assessment. This programme is led very effectively by the two leaders of learning and teaching and now supported well by the academy's improvement partner. Encouragingly, senior leaders' own teaching is at least good; they are able to demonstrate what good teaching looks like and model best practice by working alongside other teachers. There are some signs of the impact of this in, for example, the good teaching and learning seen in a food technology lesson and in the support for newly qualified teachers.



By the time of the second monitoring visit, senior and subject leaders must ensure that all teachers have made significant improvements and:

- set much higher expectations for the standard and quality of work they want pupils to produce
- plan lessons that address the basic questions about, for example, what they expect all pupils to learn, how this ensures progression in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding, how they will know that learning is taking place during the lesson and that all pupils are making progress, how they will build on what pupils already know, understand and can do, and how they will change tack if the learning is not what they expected
- ensure that their teaching takes full account of what they know about individual pupils' current progress
- use a range of approaches and learning tasks to ensure that learning proceeds at a good pace
- check learning in lessons; for example, by making better use of questioning to involve all pupils, check their understanding and deepen their thinking
- ensure that pupils are supported well when giving them more challenging work
- provide pupils with good feedback on their learning that helps them to improve their work, consolidate and/or deepen their understanding and make good progress
- teach in a way that interests pupils and encourages them to have more positive attitudes to their work by, for example, responding well to higher levels of challenge and to the feedback teachers give them about their work.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils conduct themselves well and safely in lessons and around the academy, despite the poor quality of the buildings. They move to lessons promptly and most arrive ready to learn. Even in lessons when teaching does not maintain their interest and attention, they mostly behave well. They are polite, courteous and often a delight to speak to. Pupils wear their uniform with pride. They are open and honest in their views and want the academy to get better; they view it as an essential and valuable part of their community.

Other than those who joined in Year 7 in September, pupils in the school have grown up in an atmosphere where they were not sufficiently challenged by teachers. As a result, many do not show positive attitudes to their learning. They do not always push themselves to work hard and do not respond well even when teachers give them good feedback on their work. Many pupils now recognise that the changed culture introduced by the Executive Headteacher and other senior leaders means that their attitudes have to change. They mostly welcome this, but do not yet

have the skills to respond as well as they would like. This will take time and is dependent on teachers changing their approach first.

The assistant headteacher responsible for pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare fully understands what needs to improve and has a clear vision for where the academy needs to be and of how to get there. She is planning significant changes, for example in introducing a new behaviour policy that will focus on improving pupils' attitudes as well as their behaviour. She is also making small incremental changes, for example in the use of the academy's 'isolation room' so that pupils sent there spend shorter periods of time with a focus on getting them ready to go back into lessons, rather than spending the whole day 'in isolation'. This assistant head is being supported more and more by the two progress leaders as they grow into this role under her good leadership.

Senior leaders fully understand that substantial and systemic improvements are required to make rapid progress in improving pupils' attitudes to support improvements in their achievement. By the time of the next visit:

- subject leaders must be taking much more responsibility for improving pupils' attitudes to their work in their subject area
- in their role as form tutors, teachers must be taking more of an active role in supporting the progress leaders to improve pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance, in checking and supporting pupils' progress, and in initiating contact with parents
- in teaching their subjects, teachers must be taking more responsibility by teaching in a way that promotes good attitudes to learning and dealing with behaviour that does not meet expectations in the lesson, rather than resorting too quickly to implement more formal behaviour procedures.

The Executive Headteacher has introduced mentoring for a small number of pupils who need more help in adopting positive attitudes to school or with their work. The use of Cinderford Rugby Club to raise the aspirations of some pupils, boys in particular, is one good example. Raising the desperately low achievement of many boys is a key priority for the academy's senior leaders.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

The May 2015 inspection judged that the outcomes for pupils were inadequate. This was confirmed by the exceptionally poor examination results in 2015 for all groups of pupils and across a very wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.

Observations of learning in English, mathematics, science and other subjects during this visit indicate that pupils currently in the academy are not making anywhere near enough progress. The gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils, such as boys and girls, or those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are not,

are not closing quickly enough. Pupils of all ages and at all levels are not being challenged to produce the standard of work they are capable of. Far too much work, including some seen in a Year 10 science lesson, is at a level that many pupils confidently produce when in primary school. There is far too much repetition of work that pupils have already shown that they can do. In two Year 11 English lessons, the pace of learning was determined by the pupils and was far too slow. On the few occasions when they are challenged to work at a higher level, pupils do not have the skills or depth of understanding to respond well. Some work in Year 9 mathematics that appeared to be challenging actually involved pupils in routinely following a procedure shown by the teacher, rather than developing a greater depth of thinking and understanding.

Many pupils, particularly but not only those who enter the academy with higher starting points, would relish more challenge. They want to be pushed harder, but complain that, when they are, they are often not supported well enough to succeed.

Pupils' progress is now being monitored more systematically and accurately. This enables senior leaders to identify and put in place targeted support for those pupils that need it. The developing role of key stage progress leaders is starting to help with this. However, senior leaders understand that short-term measures to support pupils' progress are only compensating for weaknesses in teaching and this is not sustainable. They fully recognise the need to dramatically improve the quality of teaching to secure sustained improvements in pupils' achievement.

Many pupils enter the school at the start of Year 7 with low-level skills in reading, writing, speaking and mathematics; this inhibits their progress in all subjects. Improving this is rightly a priority for senior leaders and is being tackled by raising all teachers' awareness of the need to develop these skills whenever they can in their subject teaching and in their feedback to pupils on their work. This is slowly starting to improve the quality of some pupils' work, but is inhibited by teachers' expectations that are too low and pupils too often not responding to the feedback they are given.

### **External support**

The sponsor, SGS Academy Trust, is providing high-quality leadership and strategic, practical and financial support. This is essential to secure the substantial improvement required and the future success of this academy. At this stage, this support has enabled the Executive Headteacher and senior leadership team to build the secure frameworks necessary to make the substantial improvements to the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement. The CEO of the Trust and the Chair of the Local Governing Body share, with the Executive Headteacher, a clear vision for the future of the academy. They are relentless in driving forward the improvements and developments necessary to achieve this in a challenging, but realistic, timescale.

The academy's improvement partner, Pate's Grammar School, is providing good practical support to improve the quality of teaching. However, the impact of this will be limited by the lack of a long-term secure arrangement lasting the duration of the monitoring process and beyond. The need to constantly secure short-term funding is a major hindrance to the ongoing effectiveness of the support Pate's can provide.