

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



21 October 2015

Mr S Lomax
The Nuneaton Academy
Radnor Drive
Nuneaton
Warwickshire
CV10 7PD

Dear Mr Lomax

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Nuneaton Academy

Following my visit with Nigel Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, and Patrick Amieli, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 7 and 8 October 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action 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 (NQTs) without first consulting with me.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, and so raise achievement, especially in mathematics and science, by ensuring that:
 - students are given activities which interest and challenge them
 - teachers have high expectations of students and ensure that they take pride in their work and complete all tasks set, including homework
 - the marking of students' work gives them clear guidance on how to improve, in accordance with the academy's marking policy
 - teachers use data on students' current progress to ensure that the work they set is always hard enough to move their learning forward.

- Improve the behaviour of students by:
 - ensuring that less learning is disrupted by off-task behaviour in lessons and the amount of time spent by senior staff responding to incidents is reduced
 - improving the attendance of students in those groups where it is below the national average.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that new leaders and teachers clearly understand their roles and responsibilities through an effective induction programme
 - ensuring that all leaders receive training to become more effective in monitoring the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that policies and procedures are more consistently applied across the academy
 - monitoring more closely the impact of the pupil premium funding on improving the achievement of eligible pupils.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

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

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met the operational principal, the executive principal, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, and representatives from the multi-academy trust.

Context

Since my last visit, the leadership team has changed significantly. The interim principal has now left, as planned, and the previous vice principal has been appointed as operational principal. A new vice principal joined the academy in July and a further vice principal joined in September. The senior leadership team now consists of three vice principals, an assistant principal and a new senior role for support for learning. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) is now part of the extended leadership team. An executive principal from a local outstanding school has also been appointed.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2015, outcomes for students have further declined and this now represents a three-year downward trend. The exceptionally low proportion of students who achieved 5 good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is of deep concern, representing as it does a failure to ensure that students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. However, of even greater concern is the very low rates of progress in all year groups, particularly in English and mathematics, but across almost all subjects, with the exception of history and Spanish.

Leaders at all levels have been shocked by the level of decline, in a year when they had been expecting improved outcomes for students. Much analysis and review has been carried out and inaccurate assessment has been identified as a root cause. Nonetheless, questions remain about why academy leaders and the multi-academy trust were unaware of the problems with assessment, particularly as external moderation in mathematics had taken place.

However, carefully thought-out systems have now been introduced to ensure much greater accountability at all levels, alongside new partnerships at a strategic level, brokered by the multi-academy trust. A very experienced executive principal from a local outstanding school is now providing regular, weekly support and challenge to ensure that the capacity of both leaders and subject teachers to assess, monitor, review and take action through a cycle of rigorous quality assurance is increased rapidly.

Despite these measures, it is far too early to identify any positive impact on outcomes for students. Furthermore, it remains the case that, in Years 8 to 10, current tracking of progress is based on inaccurate assessment, so has little real value at this point. The new cycle of half-termly assessment will begin to address the issue, particularly as teachers' assessments will be checked and monitored for accuracy. However, leaders are aware that initially it is likely that students' rates of progress will be considerably lower in all year groups than currently appears to be the case, as the issue with inflated assessment is tackled.

Conversely, achievement in the sixth form has continued to improve. Although outcomes overall remain below national averages and minimum standards, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of students who achieve both academic and vocational qualifications. This year, for the first time, 100% achieved A-E at A level.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improving teaching is, rightly, a major focus for the academy and a number of new initiatives have been put into place since September. These include a 'toolkit' focused on improving progress through greater challenge, and a revised marking policy that aims to help students to better understand how they can improve. Staff have approached these with great enthusiasm. However, these initiatives are not yet embedded and there remains inconsistency in their application across subjects and year groups. For instance, the majority of teachers have quickly complied with the new marking policy, but there is significant variability in how well they are doing this. Consequently, impact on students' progress is yet to be measurable and you agree that there is more work to be done to ensure uniformly high-quality feedback, and to develop students' ability to respond to feedback appropriately so that progress in knowledge, skills and understanding can be clearly seen over a sequence of work. Nonetheless, students told inspectors that they appreciated the new way of marking because they are given much clearer advice about how to make progress.

We agreed that too many teachers still do not have routinely high expectations of what students can achieve and consequently they are not providing the level of challenge required to rapidly improve rates of progress. In too many instances, teachers provide the same activities for all students regardless of their starting points, so that the most able find the work too easy and the less able sometimes struggle.

Many teachers lack the confidence to plan activities that involve students in taking a lead in their own learning. Inspectors noted that students were rarely involved in active discussion and that there are too few opportunities for students to practise and apply the skills they have learned independently. As a result, when faced with such challenges as examinations, they are unable to reproduce the level of achievement seen in their books. Where teachers did ensure that students were active and involved, for instance during the Year 9 Lion Heart Challenge day that

was in progress during our visit, students worked collaboratively and productively on addressing real-life problems such as bullying, sexual exploitation and keeping themselves safe.

You and your leaders agree that literacy in particular is a key issue for students at the academy, and this is identified as a priority in the academy's development plan. However, currently there is no whole academy literacy or numeracy policy. As a result, although there are pockets of good practice, most notably in technology, most teachers are not supporting this aspect of students' needs effectively. We discussed your plans to ensure that this aspect of teaching and learning is given immediate priority.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The new behaviour policy, building on the early steps taken last academic year, is beginning to have a positive impact on conduct around the academy, including in the classroom. Behaviour records demonstrate this with a substantial reduction in recorded incidents in comparison to the same period last year. Staff and students appreciate the change. They say that the system is clear, fair and effective, if occasionally inconsistently applied. We discussed and agreed that, at this early stage, there has been less impact on improving students' attitudes to learning. At this point, students tend to comply with rules rather than actively engage with their learning. Nonetheless, where teaching is lively, interesting and challenging, students can, and do, respond well. Examples of real enthusiasm for learning were seen by inspectors in mathematics, food technology and drama. In these lessons, students were keen to ask questions, test out their ideas and work collaboratively to support each other.

Attendance is continuing to improve for all groups of students and is now much closer to the national average. Permanent and fixed-term exclusions have also significantly reduced, although they remain above average.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has become a strength in the academy. The programme, introduced last year, has had time to embed and students speak confidently of how they are helped to understand their responsibilities as British citizens; how to keep safe and manage risk and how to appreciate differences between people and the importance of tolerance. Consequently, the academy is a largely harmonious environment, where students say they feel safe and well-cared for by all staff.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The leadership team and structure are very new. However, early signs are that there are key strengths within this team, which are being employed effectively through carefully allocated roles and responsibilities. The weekly support, challenge and guidance from the executive principal is ensuring that improvement plans are focused on fewer, but more strategic, priorities, with systems developing for checking progress against targets set at all levels of responsibility.

Although at a very early stage, systems and processes introduced this term demonstrate understanding of the areas that need to be addressed urgently at leadership level. For instance, there is now a clear accountability structure in place to support and challenge middle leaders, with a coherent programme for monitoring and review. Moreover, middle leaders' roles have been clarified. There has been a marked change of emphasis in which expectations that they should monitor and review on a regular cycle within their areas of responsibility have been replaced by a requirement to do so and a set timetable to work to. This means that leaders will be able to check that responsibilities have been met much more rapidly and effectively.

A comprehensive programme of professional development for all staff in the academy has been planned, closely aligned to the weaknesses in teaching and leadership that led to last year's very disappointing results. In addition, a review of performance management systems in the academy is underway, with the aim of ensuring that all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment are taken fully into account when making judgements about the performance of teaching.

Despite these early steps, the academy is not able to demonstrate progress given the very short time that this team has been together. In particular, although you and your leaders have increasingly high expectations for students, this has not yet been effectively communicated to all staff. As a result, the level of challenge for students remains too low in too many subjects and year groups, preventing the accelerated progress required.

We agreed that an area of continuing concern is that of the sixth form. Although leadership of this phase has improved and, as noted earlier, achievement is improving, the very small intake is making it difficult for the academy to offer a broad range of qualifications to meet the needs of students. The low achievement last year has had a further negative impact as many students who would have accessed the academy's sixth form were unable to do so as they did not meet entry requirements. Consequently, there are exceptionally small groups and this does not always work in the students' favour, particularly where the development of oral skills and collaborative working are a key requirement.

Members of the local governing body have continued to work hard to develop their ability to question and challenge. For instance, governors have taken the initiative in asking leaders to review the format of self-evaluation documents and development planning to ensure that they can better monitor progress made. Minutes of meetings demonstrate a much improved understanding of information presented by academy leaders and appropriate questions posed. However, we discussed and agreed that governors were still over-dependent on the information provided for them because there are not yet enough planned opportunities for focused visits to the academy to look at first-hand evidence of progress.

External support

External support, commissioned by the multi-academy trust, has been of variable quality. That provided through consultancy for the sixth form has had a positive impact, seen in the improved outcomes for students. However, the consultant support for mathematics at Key Stage 4 has not helped the academy to improve. Multi-academy trust leaders are aware of this and have reviewed the way in which they commission support so that greater account is taken of the capacity of academy staff to make effective use of provision.