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Mrs K Turner
Principal
Sheffield Park Academy
Beaumont Close
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Dear Mrs Turner

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sheffield Park Academy

Following my visit with Suzi Clipson-Boyles and Mark Wilson, additional inspectors, to your academy on 2 and 3 December, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures in July 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

- Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State and the chair of governors.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Sheffield Park Academy

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, vice principal, other senior staff, governors, representatives of the academy's proprietor: United Learning Trust, and a representative of the Department for Children Schools and Families. Inspectors spoke informally with students at break times and during lessons.

Context

Since the inspection in July 2009, the Executive Director has left the academy. Since September, the former headteacher has been appointed as principal and the deputy headteacher as vice principal. Three middle leaders have been promoted to the wider senior leadership team. Sixteen new teachers joined the academy in September. At the time of this monitoring inspection interviews were in progress to appoint a second vice principal. On this inspection the sixth form was not inspected.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Provisional examination results for 2009 show that the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, improved to 25% meeting the academy's target. This represents an improvement on the 2008 results, although attainment remains below the government's floor target of 30%. Teacher assessments in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 showed achievement in line with targets. Just under two thirds of students reached the expected level for their age.

Inspectors identified widespread weaknesses which hamper students' achievement. Too often students make inadequate progress in their learning. Too many lessons are dull. Much teaching fails to engage students' interest, much less nurture enthusiasm for learning. Attitudes to learning are often indifferent; at worst behaviour deteriorates and further limits progress. Lessons which cater adequately for the learning needs of different groups of students are too few. Opportunities to develop basic skills in literacy and oracy are frequently missed.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase students' rates of progress in order to raise standards overall and improve their basic skills – inadequate.



Other relevant student outcomes

Not enough progress has been made in ensuring students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in their learning and personal development. Frequently, teachers give too little attention to individual needs. Training for staff and the sharing of expertise has not been sufficient. Currently, provision for supporting the most vulnerable students is ad hoc. Too much time is spent dealing with challenging behaviour and low-level disruption. Reactive rather than planned approaches are the norm. Hence, whilst a commitment to making improvements is evident amongst staff, there is good deal of frustration that actions which could make a more permanent difference are not underway.

Behaviour has not improved sufficiently since the last inspection and this is a significant barrier to raising attainment. In ten of the 24 lessons observed, unacceptable behaviour or negative attitudes contributed substantially to students' inadequate progress in learning. The number of students who are removed from lessons, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is high. In outdoor areas too many students show a lack of respect for adults, other students and the academy. A few openly smoke. Some feel it is acceptable to use abusive language, including in front of staff and visitors.

Some actions have been taken to address these problems, for example, attempts have been made to build a more positive ethos and detention has been introduced. Staff want to improve behaviour, although some feel that they do not have the necessary skills to manage this without further support. The new behaviour management approach, very recently introduced, has not been made clear enough to students, who remain uncertain of the sanctions for misbehaviour. Its inconsistent application diminishes the impact. The behaviour management strategy lacks clear direction, resulting in some staff feeling isolated in their endeavours.

Awarding the weekly attendance shield to the winning tutor group was a high point in the Year 7 assembly. However, overall attendance and persistent absence have not improved. The attendance officer has only recently been appointed and actions to date have been focused on trying to ensure accuracy of data. Prompt registering of attendance at the start of lessons is not widespread. This does not help to tackle lateness. Exclusion from school has increased substantially.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Enable students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make the progress of which they are capable both academically and in their personal development – inadequate.
- Improve behaviour, attendance and relationships through more effective support and guidance – inadequate.



The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors observed 24 lessons. The academy's own analysis judges the proportion of lessons in which teaching is good or better to be around a quarter, with a third being inadequate. Inspectors found the proportion of good teaching to be smaller and the proportion judged inadequate to be larger than the academy's figures suggest. The best lessons were characterised by teaching which focused strongly on students' learning. Activities were matched well to individual learning needs, for example, the use of modified guidance to enable those students with weaker literacy skills to access the work set. In these lessons, expectations of work rate and behaviour were high and consistently applied. Teachers had developed imaginative and thoughtfully planned learning activities.

Knowledge of individuals' needs and abilities is not used effectively. This is a key weakness of planning. Lesson plans usually identify the characteristics of groups of students, for example, how many speak English as an additional language, or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, neither this information, nor that derived from previous assessments of what students can do, is used to plan the lesson. Too often, work set is exactly the same for everyone. Consequently, some students find it too hard and some too easy. The absence of clear timeframes for planned learning activities results in loss of pace in some lessons. Starter activities vary widely in quality, ranging from time spent colouring in, with little or no learning content, to more effective short, sharp, review of previous learning as a springboard for the next part of the lesson.

In response to inspectors' feedback, teachers were generally receptive to suggestions for developing their classroom practise. Information collected by the academy from the considerable number of lesson observations is not used well enough. A whole-school picture of patterns of weakness is not available to inform actions that will have maximum impact in bringing about improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure lessons offer effective challenge and support for students' different needs by making rigorous use of assessment information – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since September the senior leadership team has not been at full strength. The impact has been to often pull the principal into dealing with day-to-day operational matters, distracting her from her strategic role. Whilst the wider senior team, almost all newly promoted, demonstrate enthusiasm and resolve to meet the task ahead, they are inexperienced in managing whole-scale school improvement of this



magnitude. A restructuring of leadership and management is underway with the aim of clarifying roles and responsibilities in order to address the urgent need to build the capacity for sustained improvement.

School improvement work lacks coherence. Coordination of the post-inspection action plan, the National Challenge Statement of Action, departmental plans and the input of a considerable number of external consultants has yet to be established. Priorities are not clear, nor are plans systematically implemented. Accountabilities are not clearly defined. Too many staff are involved in lesson observations and this has contributed to the academy's over-generous view of the quality of teaching and learning. The absence of a well understood behaviour management strategy with robust leadership is a significant weakness. Senior staff report that a very recent strategic planning event has clarified for them the priorities, actions and success criteria necessary to effect change. Whilst this is a positive step, three months into the autumn term, it is relatively late. There is a considerable journey to be made.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Build the capacity to improve by putting in place effective structure for leading and managing at all levels – satisfactory.
- Build the capacity to improve by sharpening the focus of monitoring and making better use of the information derived from it to secure a consistent drive for improvement – inadequate.

External support

The post-inspection action plan, jointly owned by the academy's proprietor, governors and senior leaders, has been modified in response to the evaluation feedback from Ofsted. However, it still contains weaknesses which limit its potential to be effective in driving improvement. Success criteria are often imprecise. So too are timeframes for carrying out monitoring and judging impact. Where several people are responsible for one or more actions, accountability is diffuse. Too many actions are planned simultaneously. Collectively, these weaknesses make it difficult for the academy to gauge with certainty whether actions are having the intended impact.

Links forged with other academies to develop staff skills through coaching and sharing of good practice are too recent for their impact to be evident. The National Challenge is more established. Staff have welcomed the practical support they derive from this initiative focused on interventions to raise attainment in English and mathematics. Support packages for other subjects are less well developed.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Establish as a matter of urgency, a robust, clearly understood and consistently applied approach to whole-school behaviour management.
- Set a manageable number of clearly understood whole-school priorities.
- Make sharper use of the outcomes of monitoring to inform the next steps in the school improvement process.