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Mr David Johnson
Interim Principal
Sheffield Park Academy
Beaumont Close
Sheffield
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Dear Mr Johnson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of: Sheffield Park Academy

Following my visit with Anthony Briggs, Ariane Roberts, Lyn Field and Peter Cox, additional inspectors, to your academy on 16 and 17 March, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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: satisfactory
- Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to discussion with the lead inspector.

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 second monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal, associate principal, other senior staff, a group of teachers, governors, a representative 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 and met with representatives of the students' council.

Context

Since the monitoring visit in December 2009, the principal has left the academy. An interim principal and an associate principal have been appointed. Their presence has been phased in gradually. At the time of the monitoring visit they had been present at the academy in a full-time capacity for two weeks. Substantive appointments to two additional substantive vice-principal posts have been secured for an April start. The Regional Executive (North) for United Learning Trust works in the academy on a weekly basis.

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

The examination results for 2009 were reported in the first monitoring letter.

Significant improvements in relationships and behaviour have created a climate which better supports learning. Actions taken to improve teaching and learning are informed by monitoring that is sharper than was the case at the last visit. While many of the agreed strategies are at an early stage of implementation, their impact, though fragile, is evident in some lessons. The accuracy of the academy's self-assessment is considerably improved. The collective impact of these improvements has been to counter inertia and move the academy in the right direction towards raising attainment.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour has improved significantly. The academy is a much calmer place than it was in December 2009. Inspectors observed fewer incidents of poor behaviour around the site. Relationships in lessons are more positive. Call outs to deal with disruptive behaviour in lessons are declining steadily. Nevertheless, a small minority



of students display negative attitudes which fuel inappropriate behaviours that disrupt learning sometimes, despite the teacher's best efforts to engage them. The academy now operates in a climate more conducive to learning. Less time is wasted managing inappropriate behaviours leaving more available for learning. Senior leaders are only too aware that more work is needed to move behaviour to satisfactory.

Attendance remains a serious cause for concern. On the first day of this inspection attendance was only 86% and very low in Year 11. The average attendance figure for the sixth form since January is lower still. The academy has established links with Sheffield Children's Services to work in partnership to tackle this intractable problem.

Inspectors were provided with case studies of a very small number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which show them to be making the expected progress. Inspectors observed a number of interventions with individuals or small groups and found students to be working well and generally displaying positive attitudes to work. However, the academy was not able to provide recent tracking data on all students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Progress since the last monitoring visit 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 – satisfactory
- Improve behaviour and relationships through more effective support and guidance– good
- Improve attendance through more effective support and guidance– inadequate

The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors observed 42 lessons or part-lessons. The quality of teaching was good in a third of lessons and inadequate in just under a quarter. This represents a modest improvement since the last visit. Better behaviour and relationships in lessons, rather than a significant shift in the overall quality of teaching, are the main reasons for the improvements in learning.

In the better lessons, students' behaviour is managed well. The use of praise and sanction is underpinned by stronger relationships. Tasks engage students actively in learning; they are interested and at times demonstrate the enthusiasm to ask questions that extend their own learning. Effective questioning challenges students to extend their thinking in some lessons and imaginative activities capture their interest. Teachers insist on full answers with students justifying their opinions and this is helping to extend speaking and listening skills. These lessons are still too infrequent.

The major barrier to progress in weaker lessons is planning that does not take enough account of the different points individuals are at in their learning. Students do the same tasks irrespective of their abilities and teachers' checks to ensure that they all understand clearly and make good gains in their knowledge, are often infrequent or not well executed. Where activities are too long or repetitive, students lose interest, behaviour deteriorates and progress in learning falters.

Members of the school council told inspectors that behaviour has improved. They also reported that teaching has improved in some lessons, although they would welcome a greater variety of learning activities. Better systems for monitoring provision and outcomes are giving senior and middle leaders a more accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses, and importantly, are beginning to show where actions are and are not making a difference. Closer links between pastoral and academic teams underpin the better use of assessment information to identify underachievement and target intervention.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Much has been achieved in a short time. Improvements in leadership and management and behaviour have been significant in enabling the academy to make up much lost ground. The capacity for improvement at senior level has been strengthened by an increase in the number of senior staff sharing the load, and by their collective experiences of managing change in difficult circumstances. However, the impact of leadership overall remains variable, for example, inspectors observed low expectations in the management of sixth-form provision. Systems and structures to drive improvement are developing greater coherence. Priorities are better understood by staff.

Crucially for the academy, the changes in leadership have effected good improvements in behaviour. Senior staff confidently model appropriate behaviours and are themselves highly visible at lesson changeover, break and lunchtime. Staff presence in communal areas is greater as is their willingness to engage with students. Confidence has increased. Better coordination of the work of partners brings much needed clarity to school improvement work. Senior staff and other managers are beginning to use the outcomes of sharper lesson observation and other measures more effectively to plan their next steps. Consequently, priorities are being set from a more informed perspective.

The academy is now better placed to shift the emphasis of improvement work more strongly into classrooms to develop teachers' skills in the use of strategies to support learning. This needs to happen quickly. Vigour and momentum need to be maintained if the academy is to keep on target for the removal of special measures by July 2011.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the areas for improvement:

- Build the capacity to improve by putting in place effective structures for leading and managing at all levels – good
- 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 – good

External support

The academy's proprietor has acted quickly and decisively to tackle shortcomings identified in December 2009. The impact has been to strengthen strategic leadership and the systems necessary to improve provision and outcomes. Amendments to the post-inspection action plan have addressed weaknesses identified at the last visit. The proprietor's school improvement service and the National Challenge are working together closely to support the academy's interim leaders by providing frequent evaluation of the impact of their work. Closer links between the academy and Sheffield Children's Services are welcomed by both partners.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Improve the attendance of all students, including those in the sixth form and especially of Year 11.
- Develop teachers' skills in using strategies to support learning in order to accelerate students' progress in lessons.