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11 December 2014

Mark Watts
Head of school
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Dear Mr Watts

Special measures monitoring inspection of Nottingham University Samworth Academy

Following my visit with Nigel Bragg, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Marian Conolly, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9–10 December 2014, 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 third 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 newly qualified teachers.

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 Education Funding Agency (EFA), the DfE Academies Advisers Unit, the Chair of the Local Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Strengthen teaching to good or better by:
 - eradicating the large proportion of inadequate teaching
 - providing staff with sharply focused coaching and training to address weaknesses and hold them to account to improve
 - improving marking and the use of individual targets, so students know what they are aiming for and how to improve their work
 - promoting the importance of homework and then ensuring that it is of high quality.

- Increase the rate of progress of all groups of pupils in all subjects by:
 - demonstrating higher expectations of what students should achieve by insisting on a high rate of work in every lesson
 - training teachers to use assessment information well to plan work that is tailored to meet the needs of all students and then check that they make good progress in lessons
 - holding teachers to account for giving disabled students and those who have special educational needs the help they require in lessons to overcome the barriers to learning that they experience
 - challenging the more-able students from the minute they walk into lessons to the end, so they are challenged to think harder and expected to produce work of a much higher quality.

- Improve the behaviour and safety of students by:
 - creating and implementing a strategic plan to reduce the exclusion rate and improve attendance
 - ensuring that teachers insist on much higher standards of behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons
 - promoting spiritual and cultural development effectively through the curriculum.

- Strengthen leadership and governance at all levels by:
 - securing basic day-to-day management structures such as the timetable, so the academy runs smoothly
 - changing the staffing structure, so that it is fit for purpose and staff are rewarded appropriately for their teaching and leadership responsibilities
 - equipping leaders at all levels, initially senior leaders, with the necessary skills so that they can fulfil their responsibilities
 - establishing the purpose of the sixth form and then providing appropriate post-16 courses that meet the needs of students
 - securing equality of opportunity for students by providing them with the courses, subjects and advice that they require to improve their future economic well-being

- ensuring that governors are much more rigorous in holding leaders to account for academy improvement
- making sure that pupil premium funding is spent appropriately to improve outcomes for those students it is intended for.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the academy. An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 9–10 December 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed 19 parts of lessons and visited an assembly and morning registration sessions. Almost all the observations of lessons and scrutiny of students' work were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including current assessment data, the academy's self-evaluation, the head of school's report to governors, external reviews, behaviour and safeguarding policies, and other monitoring information about teaching. Inspectors met with the head of school and other senior leaders, leaders of the core subjects, the Chair and other members of the Local Governing Body, members of the pastoral team and representatives from the academy sponsors. Inspectors also spoke with groups of students and examined their workbooks. Inspectors observed students' behaviour during lunch and break times. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors spoke with students about careers advice and guidance, and examined this aspect of the academy's work.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, 26 new teachers have started at the academy, including 17 newly qualified teachers. The staff structures for support and pastoral staff were reviewed and a number of changes made, including the recruitment of a social worker to the academy staff and an executive assistant to the head of school. Nine new support staff roles have been created and appointments made within the academy. They include: five assistant heads of year, a senior pastoral support coordinator, a transition coordinator, a post-16 coordinator and a data manager. A new representative from the sponsor, Nottingham University, has joined the local governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The 2014 examination results were a positive upward trend for the academy. Many more students achieved GCSEs or equivalent qualifications than ever before. The proportion of students achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics rose compared to previous years. Notable among the successes were the results for the English GCSE, which exceeded national averages for expected progress made by students. Attainment in science improved and the proportion achieving at least one GCSE or equivalent rose significantly. Both progress and attainment for mathematics were below national averages. However, the proportion of low-attaining students making expected progress exceeded national averages in both English and mathematics. The academy attributes this success to the increased level of support and guidance given to students with additional learning needs last year. Information and communication technology, photography and social sciences subjects also made

considerable improvements. The proportion of students achieving the best grades of A* and A rose significantly.

The achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium funding is improving overall. However, the in-school gap in English and mathematics between these students and others is still wide. They are approximately one grade behind their peers. The gap compared to the average attainment of other students nationally is much smaller in English than mathematics, which remains unacceptably high. An increased focus by all teachers towards the particular learning needs of these students, and improved targeted support, are contributing to better outcomes this year shown in the current assessments made by the academy.

Current achievement for Year 11 is mostly positive. The academy predicts a continuing upward trend in overall attainment. Mathematics results are set to improve considerably in 2015. Academy leaders attribute this to more stable staffing and improved teaching. Interviews with and the examination of the books of some of the most-able students, suggest that these students' attainment is not as high as it should be in, particularly in mathematics. They are given insufficient opportunities to deepen their understanding. Progress across subjects in Key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9) remains variable. More specifically, boys are underperforming compared to girls. Academy leaders have recognised this and prioritised this issue as an area to be addressed this year.

Reliability of assessment information is a priority for the academy. Much work is underway to ensure that teachers' assessments are accurate, including key subject leaders working closely within the Torch Academy Gateway Trust schools to prepare common tests.

Achievement in the A2 courses and the vocational courses in the sixth form was good in 2014. The quality of support and guidance about course choices has improved retention rates. Of those students who left last year and who applied for higher education courses, all won their first choice of places. Destination information suggests that the number of students not in employment, education or training ('NEETs') is very small. However, very few students passed their GCSE mathematics or English with a good pass. Arrangements to ensure better provision for students completing their GCSEs have been put into place this year.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching across the academy is improving. The stability in staffing this year has improved the progress students make in lessons, and new staff have brought new energy and ideas to the classrooms. Almost all inadequate teaching has been eradicated.

Where teaching is very successful, teachers show an excellent understanding of the capabilities of their students. They pitch the work at the right level and stretch the most-able to achieve even more. Relationships in the classroom and the level of engagement by students have much improved across the academy. Teachers are successful in creating the right learning environment. Students who spoke to inspectors said that they enjoy their lessons now, and their exercise books reflect a good level of pride in the work they produce.

Most teachers now use assessment data to plan the learning activities but the delivery and execution of these plans are not always successful. This is because the assessments are not always accurate and the level of challenge is not always high enough.

The quality of marking is much improved. Departments are beginning to work more consistently in the way they mark work and give feedback to students. However, few opportunities are given for students to respond to teachers' feedback and make corrections. Expectations and the level of challenge for the most-able are not always high enough. This remains a key challenge for academy leaders to address. Homework is set more often and checked by teachers. Academy leaders have not undertaken an evaluation of the quality of homework set.

The quality of support provided by teaching assistants is now strong. They have a good understanding of the specific learning needs of the students with whom they work. Their work is particularly effective with students with physical disabilities.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' mostly positive attitudes to their learning, their orderly conduct around the academy, and good engagement in lessons, are now particular strengths of the academy. Inspectors witnessed almost no low-level disruption to lessons and students report that behaviour is much improved. They particularly attribute the good behaviour at lunchtimes to the increased supervision provided by sixth form students. Electronic lesson registration, increased monitoring and better students' attitudes, have ensured that there is no truancy from lessons now. Incidents of bullying have significantly reduced compared to last year. New behaviour management systems and consistent application of the policy by teachers have had positive impacts on the working and learning environment of the academy.

Attendance, while improving, is still below national averages. From September, in Years 9 and 11, only 92% of students attended regularly. Across the academy, nearly one in ten are absent for more than 15% of the time. A significant proportion of these absences are due to unauthorised holidays taken during term-time. Punctuality to school has improved, although a very small minority of students still do not come to school on time. An educational social worker has been employed to work with the academy to, among other things, help reduce absences. In addition,

new recent appointments of non-teaching assistant heads of year will allow further support of the work to improve attendance. Early indications suggest that these new appointments are having a positive impact.

Fixed-term exclusions have reduced but remain high compared to national averages. Boys and those eligible for pupil premium funding are disproportionately represented in these figures. A high number of exclusions are of students from Years 8 and 9. Academy leaders have already begun to address this issue by working closely with community liaison police officers and a number of youth services to prevent anti-social behaviour. In addition, an internal exclusion area and alternative provision for those at risk of exclusion provide additional support to reduce incidents of poor behaviour.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership of the head of school and senior leaders has had a significant impact on the progress the academy is making towards the removal of special measures. The head of school has provided a strong and steady steer for the academy. Work over the past year to improve the provision for students and change the culture and ethos of the academy, is having a positive impact on students' aspirations and outcomes. The vision of high expectations and standards is communicated clearly. Important changes to the management structure and staffing, and the large number of new appointments, are proving to be critical milestones in the journey of the academy. Staff are now overwhelmingly supportive of the leadership team. Improvement plans reflect a sound understanding of the key challenges facing the academy. Activities to effect further improvements are well thought-out, appropriate and linked to sharp success criteria.

The teaching staff work more collaboratively and understand the aims and priorities for the academy. The leadership of teaching is growing in strength, and strong support is provided for new teachers, especially for the large cohort of newly qualified teachers. The continuous professional development opportunities have already had an impact on the quality of teaching. Quality assurance activities are carried out regularly, although the scrutiny of students' books is not always carried out as thoroughly as it could be.

Improved data support systems to monitor and track students' progress have enabled all teachers to access key information about students, including groups, much more easily. This has had a direct impact on the improved quality of planning by teachers. Analysis of assessment data is carried out thoroughly. Moderation activities to ensure the validity of assessments are becoming more robust, although leaders recognise that further external support is necessary. Plans to standardise assessments via the trusts' Progress Board is now underway.

Subject leaders of the core subjects understand their roles and responsibilities and they carry out their monitoring roles regularly but not always effectively. They have undergone training to improve their leadership skills. They are in the process of building their teams and this has already resulted in improved teaching and greater consistency in practice across many departments. They receive good support from their line managers, external advisers and link governors. Other new leaders' skills are improving as a result of the strong support and coaching provided. The head of the sixth form and the special educational needs coordinator continue to provide strong leadership in their areas of responsibility.

Governors continue to carry out their duties effectively. They provide strong challenge and support to leaders. After the review of governance, new structures were introduced, including focus meetings and new link governors. These have further improved the level of scrutiny of the academy's work. The executive headteacher has increased the monitoring and support of the head of school through weekly early morning meetings.

The academy recognises the need to strengthen significantly its delivery of information, advice and guidance (IAG) to raise all students' ambition and aspirations. A good range of improvement initiatives has been developed but, in many cases, is at any early stage of implementation and, as a result, its current impact is often limited. From January 2014, improvements to support Year 8 students in making informed and realistic decisions should be in place and include more relevant targeted IAG to support individual students. Current arrangements help students to choose their GCSE options but the individualisation of guidance interventions, and involvement of parents in students' decision making, requires improvement. Teachers have started to compile Year 11 student profiles through the use of short interviews. Students applying for further and higher education are effectively supported. Some useful external links have been made to enrich the school's approach to IAG. However, this work is at an early stage and it is too early to make a judgement on its effectiveness. Staff responsible for IAG are enthusiastic and have many plans to secure improvement. However, across all year groups, the school places an overreliance on teachers' personal knowledge and experience to inform discussions on the available education, training and employment options.

Library resources, to fuel students' appreciation of the range of available progression routes and careers, are poor. The promotion of training routes, including those leading to apprenticeships, is underdeveloped. Strategies to encourage non-stereotypical views of future career options are not strong enough. The school does not routinely utilise work experience and 'taster days' to allow students to test their career aspirations within a work environment.

The academy has very recently introduced an effective process to identify Year 11 students, who are potential 'NEETs'. However, the process does not yet apply to other year groups. The school is at the early stages of interrogating available data to

inform an evaluation of its overarching NEET strategy. NEET figures for 2013/14 for Year 11 indicate a low NEET rate. The school works well with the National Careers service to provide IAG to specific groups in Year 11 and further support and interventions should any become NEET.

External support

Nottingham University is a strong sponsor for the school. Valuable support has been provided for the newly qualified teachers who spent four weeks in the summer holidays being inducted into the academy. The academy has accessed a range of support from the schools within The Torch Academy Gateway Trust. The trust has introduced a number of discussion forums, such as the 'Curriculum and Pastoral Hub', which subject leaders value because they share good practice and learn from others who have experienced and overcome the same difficulties. In addition, the development of the Progress Board provides further opportunities for curriculum leaders to validate their teacher assessments.