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Dr Therese Quincey
Principal
Red House Academy
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Dear Dr Quincey

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Red House Academy

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 4 December 2012, and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and students who spoke with me while I was at the academy.

Since the time of the previous inspection, a full complement of teaching staff has been secured in English and mathematics, including a new appointment to subject leadership in English at Key Stage 3. Although there have been no changes to personnel in the senior team, there has been a restructuring of roles and responsibilities to provide greater capacity for improvement. For example, a new data manager role provides support for the collection and analysis of students' progress information. A new facility – the Bridge Centre – caters for a small number of students identified as having specific weaknesses in reading, writing and mathematics.

As a result of the inspection on 7 March 2012, the academy was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

As a result of improvements to provision across the academy, students' levels of attainment are rising. For example, in the examinations in the summer of 2012, the proportion of students securing five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and mathematics, rose to 36%. This represented an increase of 17 percentage points on the previous year and is now above the current minimum benchmark set by the government for secondary schools and academies. Improvement was most marked for students of broadly average ability and for some higher-attaining students. However, overall gains were more modest for those students supported through the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government), for students with special educational needs and for some low-



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

attaining students because the academy did not target its actions as intensively across these groups. Nevertheless, as a consequence of a strong focus on additional support and intervention, and improvements in the overall quality of teaching across the academy, inspection evidence confirms that students are now making better progress in many subject areas. Younger students in particular who spoke to the inspector said that they enjoy most lessons, get on well with their teachers and feel they are making good progress. They say that, most of the time, teachers manage lessons well and that their learning is only rarely disturbed by off-task behaviour of other students.

The overall quality of teaching is improving. Students' learning and progress were good in the majority of lessons seen during the inspection and nothing was inadequate. A scrutiny of students' work shows that this better progress is now more commonplace. Most work seen showed pride in presentation and was generally well marked. However, not all teachers have considered how best to encourage students to respond effectively to the written feedback provided, including attending to corrections of spelling and punctuation.

In the best lessons, a productive pace, linked to real contexts and engaging activities, ensures students' interest is maintained. A focus on planning across a series of lessons is providing an emphasis on developing learning over a longer period. However, in some instances, this means that the learning aims of individual lessons are unclear or emphasise what will be done rather than what skills, knowledge and understanding will be developed. This means that, by the end of some lessons, students and teachers are not able to identify clearly what has been learnt or where gaps or misconceptions remain. In a few lessons, students work individually for too long on tasks that do not inspire or interest them. As a result, opportunities are sometimes missed to identify and reinforce key learning points through effective whole-class teaching. Actions taken to improve students' literacy skills are gathering momentum, including through the targeted support provided for some students in Years 7 to 10 who need extra help with their reading. While some teaching places a strong emphasis on developing students' speaking and listening skills, not all lessons exploit this aspect well.

The governing body has played a significant part in recent progress. It balances well its strategic support for the academy with its involvement in the finer detail of academy improvement. Governors are experienced and knowledgeable and provide effective challenge for the academy. While they are fully committed to securing the best provision for all students, they have not yet held the academy sharply to account for the progress of specific groups of students, or for the impact of targeted support, such as that provided through the pupil premium.

Supported by the governing body, senior leaders have taken a fundamental and principled approach to improvement. They have balanced strategies designed to boost achievement in the short-term with a concerted effort to raise the overall quality of teaching across the academy. These improvements have been underpinned by good progress in strengthening important aspects of the academy's work: the quality and use of assessment information is much improved; structures to ensure accountability at all levels have been firmly



established; support and training for teachers is comprehensive, collaborative and well-designed; performance management is more rigorous and is linked sharply to teachers' development through the 'teacher profile'; and the checks made on teaching quality are accurate and founded on a broad range of evidence. Senior leaders recognise that, although these stronger management systems are becoming embedded, further refinements are needed to ensure greater impact: the records of the evaluation of teaching do not currently ensure consistently sharp points for improvement for every teacher; the pattern of monitoring and support is not yet sufficiently flexible to adapt to the needs of different teachers and leaders with subject responsibility are not yet fully involved in the process of monitoring and evaluating teaching effectiveness across their subject teams.

Good progress is evident in other aspects of the academy's work. For example, governors and senior leaders have worked hard to recruit and retain good-quality teachers in English and mathematics. Nevertheless, senior leaders recognise that further, targeted, support is required for recently-appointed unqualified and inexperienced members of staff who teach these subjects. The choices available for students to study science in Key Stage 4 have been improved, reflecting a focus on strengthening provision in the engineering faculty. In addition, the academy has made significant strides in improving the quality and use of assessment information. This is enabling leaders to regularly check on the progress made by every student across the academy, and this informs a three-week programme of support in literacy and numeracy skills for those students who are falling behind. The academy is in the process of establishing how best to evaluate the impact of this initiative. While this better use of progress data is evident at an academy-wide level, not all teachers are using this information well to make sure all groups of students, whatever their ability, are challenged to make good progress in every lesson.

The academy receives valuable support from a variety of sources, including through links established with help from the academy's co-sponsors. Visits carried out to a range of other schools and academies have helped to establish momentum for teachers' professional development. For example, a programme of action research, arranged in conjunction with Sunderland University, is supporting work to improve younger students' transition from feeder primary schools and is informing the work of the academy's teaching and learning group. Support provided through the academy's improvement partner has been very effective in ensuring rigorous challenge for governors and senior leaders. The statement of action prepared by the governing body was evaluated and found to meet requirements.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mr Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012

- Raise attainment and achievement to meet or exceed the current floor standards and all targets by:
 - making sure students always make good progress from their starting points, including high attainers and those with special educational needs, particularly in English and mathematics and engineering
 - ensuring all students are fully challenged and motivated in every lesson
 - increasing students' competence and confidence when reading.

- Ensure all teaching is good or better by:
 - sharing best practice, for example, in managing students' behaviour
 - building on the current improvements in assessment, marking, and presentation of work
 - quickly implementing the governing body's plan to improve the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.

- Increase the pace of the drive to improve the overall effectiveness of the academy by:
 - ensuring the governing body and senior leaders take steps to improve teaching more rapidly
 - monitoring students' progress more frequently and continuing to hold middle leaders to account for students' attainment in English, mathematics and engineering.

