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13 November 2014

Mr Neil Hutchinson
Headteacher
Richard Rose Central Academy
Victoria Place
Carlisle
CA1 1LY

Dear Mr Hutchinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Central Academy

Following my visit with Clive Hurren and Sophie Gillies, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 11 and 12 November 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint any 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 and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better by ensuring that:
 - inadequate teaching is rapidly eradicated
 - all teachers have high expectations of students and use the information they have about their attainment to set work that is challenging for all abilities
 - students are given clear, regular and helpful feedback on their work and the level at which they are working so they understand how to improve
 - teachers apply the academy's behaviour policy consistently in lessons and ensure that all students know what is expected of them.

- Raise standards, especially in English, mathematics and science, by consistently using and meeting targets based on students making at least three levels of progress between Years 7 and 11.

- Improve attendance in all year groups, including in the sixth form, so that it is at least in line with the national average.

- Improve the impact of the academy's leaders by:
 - ensuring that governors, senior and middle leaders are more actively involved in evaluating the academy's work and respond rapidly to the priorities for improvement
 - ensuring that action plans are sharply focused on the most urgent priorities, and that the academy's progress in tackling them is checked frequently and rigorously.

- Governors must improve the quality of their work by:
 - ensuring that they have a thorough understanding of whether the work done to improve the academy's performance is making any difference
 - supporting leaders in ensuring that all teachers are held responsible for the progress of the students they teach and are provided with appropriate training to help them improve their teaching
 - ensuring that pupil premium funding has a positive impact on the achievement of students for whom it is intended
- taking part and responding to an external review of governance to identify what support and training governors need.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 11-12 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, observed teaching in a range of subjects and sampled students' work during visits to lessons. They met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Executive Principal, the Chair of the School Improvement Board who is also Chair of the United Learning Trust, the Director of United Learning, the Chair of the Local Governing Board, zone leaders and teachers. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the Chief Executive of United Learning. Inspectors spoke with students during lessons and break-times.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, full sponsorship has transferred to United Learning and the restructuring of staffing has been completed. The sponsor has appointed two full-time interim senior leaders and a mathematics consultant to support the academy three days a week. Ten new teachers have been appointed, including four teachers from overseas.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement has risen since the academy was placed in special measures but it has not risen rapidly enough to raise standards above the government's floor standards which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. In 2014 students did better in English and mathematics than they have previously and teachers' assessments were accurate in these subjects. The proportions of students making expected progress and attaining a grade C in both English and mathematics increased, but they were still well below average.

Unvalidated data indicate that the proportion of Year 11 students attaining five or more GCSEs at grade C and above in 2014 were similar to last year and well below average. Several students missed out on five grade Cs because they did not do as well as expected in subjects other than English and mathematics, particularly business studies and design and technology. The gap in achievement between students eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government money) and other students is still too wide.

Achievement of students currently in the academy is rising too slowly at present. Although teaching and attitudes to learning continue to improve, there is still too much variability within and between subjects and across key stages. There are some strengths in teaching that secure more rapid progress, for example in history, geography and science. Progress has quickened in English, mathematics and science since the start of this term and previously inadequate progress in business studies and design and technology has been tackled with changes to teaching. Progress is

stronger at Key Stage 3 where teachers build on prior learning more effectively. However, students still have many gaps in their knowledge and skills and teaching does not consistently move their learning forward quickly enough to help them catch up and work at age-related expectations, particularly at Key Stage 4.

The achievement of students in the sixth form is getting better year on year. In 2013 and 2014 students achieved close to average standards in academic subjects and well above average in vocational subjects.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving, with more engaging activities that sustain students' interest and higher expectations for their active participation in lessons. Teaching is most effective in the sixth form, where teachers have strong subject knowledge and give students the knowledge and skills they need to achieve well. Sixth form students are very positive about the support and guidance they receive in order to help them succeed.

However, in all year groups, the work set for students is not always challenging enough to move their learning forward quickly. Students spend too long going over familiar work that does not extend their knowledge and skills in some lessons, especially at Key Stage 4. Some tasks are set at too low a standard for students to achieve their target grade. For example, there are instances where students have target grades of 'B' but the work they are covering is at the level of a 'D' grade. At times, teachers do not demand enough so students end up with a piece of work that is below their capabilities or unfinished.

Feedback to students has improved since the last inspection, following training and regular checks by senior leaders. Marking provides helpful advice so students have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. However, for some teachers it is proving unmanageable to mark every piece of students' work in detail. Some teachers give verbal or brief written feedback during lessons, which students say is helpful and supportive, but this is not developed across the academy. Students' skills in self-assessment are limited because they do not always have a clear understanding of how to improve to reach the required grade.

Students with special educational needs and those who have fallen behind in their learning are given more effective personalised support but they are not always supported as well in class lessons. New initiatives to promote the literacy skills of students in Year 7 appear to be having a positive impact but will need to be evaluated thoroughly over time.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There is a stronger community spirit in the academy. Students are more positive about their learning and show greater pride in the academy. They show increasing respect and consideration for each other and their teachers. This was seen for example, in the moving Armistice Day tribute; all students showed their respect as students who are members of the local cadets led them in silent reflection. Behaviour around the academy continues to be orderly and students arrive punctually in the morning and to lessons. They are sociable at break times and comfortable in each other's company. Some students are able to express the core principles of the academy and what they mean in terms of their behaviour, but these values are not yet integral to the life of the academy.

Students' attitudes to learning are improving and interruptions to lessons are becoming increasingly rare. The boundaries are clear and all teachers are upholding the behaviour policy consistently. Students say behaviour is greatly improved. There are occasions, however, when teachers are distracted from teaching to deal with low-level off-task chat. This slows the pace of learning. Sixth form students have positive attitudes to their work, showing concentration and perseverance during independent study times. They provide good examples for behaviour, although they have little involvement with younger students.

Exclusions have increased this term as the higher expectations for behaviour and the 'zero tolerance' approach has been put into practice. Students are supportive of this and say that boundaries are clear and consistently upheld. Many expressed their appreciation that the poor behaviour by a few students is being dealt with more effectively. They say that bullying is rare and they feel safe. Internal exclusion is being planned more effectively to make sure students complete work and are supported to improve their behaviour.

Attendance was marginally better overall in 2014 than it was in the last two years, but it remains below average. Attendance is highest at Key Stage 3 but is still too low at Key Stage 4 and in Year 13. Attendance to date this term shows a considerable improvement on the same period last year, with more robust procedures to follow up absence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior team have the respect and trust of staff, students, and the local community. As one parent wrote, 'there is a growing sense of pride amongst both students and parents'. This is reflected in the increasing number of students entering the academy in Year 7. The headteacher is a visible presence around the academy and has been pivotal in improving behaviour and securing a more conducive environment for learning. Since the new sponsor has taken over fully, the senior leadership team has been strengthened with the appointment of

interim leaders who are developing assessment, curriculum and middle leadership. The senior team shows increasing capacity to secure the necessary improvements in teaching and achievement.

The line management structure has been simplified to clarify accountability and responsibilities of middle leaders. Subject leaders have a clearer understanding of what is expected of them and their teams for students' progress and the quality of teaching. Skills within middle leadership have been strengthened through some new appointments and ongoing professional development. Leadership is now stronger in English, mathematics and science but there are still some gaps in other subjects.

There are more robust strategies for improving teaching including subject reviews and personalised action plans for teachers who are not reaching the required standard in teaching. Leaders' focus, when checking teaching to date, has been mainly on teaching approaches and students' engagement in learning; ensuring that lessons are progressing without interruption. In looking at students' books, leaders have ensured that the marking policy is being applied consistently. This has resulted in consistent approaches to teaching and behaviour management across the academy. Students say they are finding lessons more engaging and enjoy the active and practical approaches.

However, there are still times when teaching is not pitched at the right level. Leaders need to check curriculum planning more closely and make sure that students are being taught knowledge and skills appropriate to their age and ability. In checking students' work leaders need to check that students are working at the right level to achieve their targets and are making sufficient progress over time.

The Strategic Improvement Board has a clear view of the challenges and a range of expertise to support strategic decision making and drive improvement. The Chair of the Local Governing Board has an in-depth understanding of the performance of the academy and of what needs to improve rapidly. The local governing board is gradually increasing in membership, with suitable skills and expertise to provide challenge and support to academy leaders.

External support

The new sponsor, United Learning, has invested in the success of the academy through the provision of leadership expertise, consultant support and training and recruitment. The Executive Principal provides quality support and training for teachers, leaders and governors. The United Learning headteachers' group provides useful links for the sharing of good practice.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Ensure that teaching is pitched at the right level to enable students to achieve their targets and build on their knowledge and skills effectively over time.

- Ensure that all teachers are confident in assessment and age-related expectations for their subject and that middle leaders regularly check that students are being taught what they need to know.