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Mr R Wallace
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wallace

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Academy

Following my visit with Eric Craven HMI, Jan Bennett HMI, Peter Cox Additional Inspector and Moira Fitzpatrick Additional Inspector, to your academy on 26 and 27 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures in December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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, the chief executive of the federation, the chair of governors and the academy's advisor at the DCSF.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Richard Rose Central Academy

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 26-27 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work including 39 lessons, four registrations and three tutorials; scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chief executive of the federation, the principal of the sixth form college, staff, parents' representatives, students and consultants.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection there have been significant staffing changes with 32 teachers and 6 non-teaching staff leaving in July. Eighteen teachers and 15 non-teaching staff joined the academy in September. In addition, some further alterations to staffing have occurred during the term. Additional temporary accommodation has been installed. The federated sixth form college began operation in September.

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

The 2009 GCSE results were lower than hoped for. The proportion of students gaining at least five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics, 28%, was below the government's floor target. As a consequence the academy remains on the National Challenge programme. Performance against all other key measures at Key Stage 4 was low compared with national averages and, overall, students' achievement was inadequate. A number of factors contributed to this such as staffing instability. Additionally, too many students were not entered for qualifications including those who followed alternative courses off-site. At Key Stage 3 teacher assessments indicate that students' attainment in the core subjects was low compared with national averages.

However, the academy has strong aspirations to raise standards and has set challenging targets that reflect this. These are based on students' attainment on entry, with the aim of overcoming any subsequent underachievement. Work begun last term to establish a system for tracking students' progress towards these targets, has continued apace. Subject leaders are now fully apprised of their responsibilities with regard to ensuring that appropriate assessments are carried out termly, including through formal examinations at the end of each year. Senior staff have increasing confidence in the rigour of the assessment process as a consequence, for instance, of GCSE moderation reports. However, with the first of three annual data collection points imminent, evidence to support this is restricted.

A number of appropriate strategies are in place to improve the performance of Year 11 students. A significant proportion have been entered early for GCSEs in English and mathematics. Eighty five students have already gained a GCSE in ICT at grade C or above, while 33 have achieved the equivalent of two GCSE passes at grade C in BTEC sport. Where appropriate, students are being entered for tests in functional literacy and numeracy when they are ready. The academy provides a good range of opportunities for Year 11 students to get extra help with their learning and revision. Additionally, the role of the form tutor as academic mentor is being strengthened to increase support for students.

A number of changes to the curriculum have been made to improve students' progress. More time has been allocated to the delivery of GCSE option subjects in Year 11, while in Year 10 all students have the opportunity to gain at least five GCSE of equivalent passes. There have been some changes to courses, such as in science, where the learning style of the BTEC is better suited to students' needs. Some GCSE courses are commencing in Year 9 with planned early entry at the end of Year 10. There is increased provision for Year 8 students struggling with literacy skills. The majority of Year 7 now learn through separate subjects with the opening minds curriculum focused on the least able. Early signs for these students are promising with good gains, for example, in reading ages. This is a consequence of the close match between topics, delivery and students' needs.

However, overall, learning in lessons is not rapid enough to accelerate students' progress sufficiently to overcome past underachievement. While the proportion of lessons observed in which learning was at least satisfactory increased compared with the previous visit, there are some lessons where learning remains inadequate. The proportion of lessons observed where learning was outstanding was very small.

Sixth form

There are 136 students in Year 12 and 88 students in Year 13, a slight increase on last year. The 2009 AS pass rate remained the same as the previous year, while the A level pass rate improved slightly but both are well below average. However, the proportion of high grade passes at A level increased by 12%. Students enter the sixth form with prior attainment that is much lower than the national average and value added data for last year showed that students did not make the progress expected of them in the vast majority of subjects.

Recent lesson observations show that the quality of teaching and learning is improving and students agree. Effective action has been taken to address the inadequate teaching identified in the summer term. Mentoring has been introduced to share best practice. Good or better teaching includes the very effective use of assessment to enhance learning and well chosen activities that challenge and motivate students of all abilities. In the satisfactory lessons, teachers talk for too long and students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning. Students



say that staff absence has been reduced this academic year and arrangements for covering lessons have been strengthened considerably. The legacy of earlier staffing issues remains, however, and many students have gaps in their knowledge that need to be filled.

External noise and poor quality accommodation are no longer adversely affecting learning. Students say that noise from the building site is much reduced since the demolition work was completed. Classrooms are fit for purpose and learning resources are at least adequate with interactive whiteboards in many rooms and easy access to computers. Security at the sixth form centre has been improved markedly.

The curriculum has been improved this year and major developments are planned for next year. A new level 2 programme was introduced in September catering for students with fewer than five high grade GCSE passes: retention on the course is good and students are making good progress. The range of advanced level options has also improved for current Year 12 students and sessions on independent study skills were introduced at the start of the year to help prepare new sixth formers for advanced level study. Much more radical curriculum changes are planned for next year involving local employers and offering work experience plus clear progression routes through to higher education and/or employment.

Academic support has been strengthened by the introduction of the Update Centre, a development appreciated by students. Students use the centre as a private study area; they drop in for help from the staff on duty and teachers refer students to the centre for additional support. Subject teachers also run workshops and lunch clubs where students can get specialist help.

The newly appointed management team has been quick to introduce much needed policies, protocols and systems but it is too early to see their full impact on outcomes for students. The team is very visible around the centre which students find reassuring. The system to monitor progress against challenging academic targets is well understood by students. Some staff use the target and monitoring information more effectively than others. The current attendance rate is around 90% which is low for a sixth form but students and staff say it is much higher than before. The new attendance monitoring system has been a major factor in bringing about the improvement. Communication with parents has been strengthened and attendance at parents' evenings is improving. Self-evaluation systems are being introduced but are still underdeveloped. Managers are self-assessing accurately but quality improvement processes are not systematic and do not involve all staff.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour and attitudes have improved further since the last monitoring inspection. This is because staff are applying the management of behaviour protocol



more consistently. Other contributory factors include a more proactive approach by pastoral support workers to heading off behaviour problems and the training staff have received in managing difficult behaviour. Changes to the academy's use of the internal exclusion and reflection rooms are also beginning to make a positive difference. Forward planning helpfully aids the seamless, temporary relocation of students to other classes when their behaviour escalates to a point where they have to be removed from a lesson. The number of fixed period exclusions is dropping although there is no clear downward trend in referrals to internal exclusion or the reflection rooms. Nevertheless, the number of students whose behaviour results in them having repeat periods of time in internal exclusion is reducing. Students themselves say that behaviour is improving. Their attitudes to learning are better: some have positive attitudes in lessons although many still remain compliant rather than enthused about their learning. In a few lessons, particularly in Key Stage 4, students behave immaturely and inappropriately when not suitably checked. At change of lesson times there are pockets of boisterous behaviour but equally some students are extremely courteous and polite. Students report that they feel safe in the academy and have no concerns about bullying. Good levels of adult supervision provide constant reassurance for all students that they are well cared for.

The academy and its federated partner academy have developed a shared facility, called the Federation Inclusion Zone, to provide personalised alternative provision for about a dozen students who have disengaged from schooling and whose behaviour and attendance have been significantly problematic. From its opening in September 2009 there have been successes in re-engaging some of these students. Academy staff recognise that there are encouraging signs that behaviour is becoming well under control but that this needs to be cemented in place.

As a result of a review of its arrangements to improve students' attendance the academy has rightly invested a shared responsibility in all staff to tackle low attendance. Tutors are now furnished with weekly attendance data on each of their students which they are expected to share with their form groups in discussions about attendance targets. Some of these discussions are much less focussed and effective than they could be. Indeed, morning tutor groups are not setting high enough expectations in preparing the students for their learning. The lacklustre start to the day that some students experience does not encourage them to make every effort to get to the academy on time and to be up for the day ahead. Students do recognise, however, that attendance has been made an imperative and most have an awareness of their current rate of attendance and target. Data on attendance are being well marshalled to allow the academy to match the types of response it makes to the different degrees of absence. Rewards have been revised so that students are commended for improving their attendance and reaching certain thresholds.

Ultimately, the academy is prepared to recommend prosecution for those parents who are resistant to its increasingly strenuous efforts to support and encourage improved attendance. However, the academy reports that the potential impact of



this ultimate sanction is not realised when its partners in tackling absence do not share the determination to use this penalty. There has been a marginal improvement in the rate of attendance since the last monitoring inspection but the academy remains short of its overall attendance target. However, this masks a fuller picture. Swine flu related absence during the autumn term has reined back further improvement. The academy has systematised its response to lateness so that parents are immediately telephoned and letters sent home if lateness continues. The data that are regularly collected on lateness are still to be analysed to show how much of a difference the new system is making. Overall, there are early signs that the revised systems and rigorous efforts to reduce absence are beginning to bear fruit.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve achievement and raise the quality of provision in the sixth form to at least satisfactory - satisfactory
- Improve the behaviour and attitudes of students by building relationships and applying agreed procedures consistently – satisfactory
- Improve attendance and punctuality to lessons – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

Progress in improving teaching and learning is gathering pace. The systems introduced by the academy are beginning to have a positive effect on improving the quality of lessons and the progress made by the students but this is uneven. Lesson planning follows a common format and is supported by information about students' prior learning. However, in too many instances this is not used well to set work for students of different abilities. The effective use of assessment to support learning is emerging but not consistently across all subjects. Sharing learning objectives at the beginning of lessons is established practice but reviewing learning at the end is much less secure. On some subjects, teachers are effective in letting their students know how to improve their work in order to reach their targets.

In the more successful lessons observed, classroom management and behaviour routines were well established. Teaching was lively and relationships between students and teachers were positive. There was an inspired use of instructors who assist in practical subjects such as design and technology and physical education (PE). They helped the teachers reach their lesson objectives and provided opportunities for students to learn from those skilled in trades such as joinery and product design and, as seen in an outstanding PE lesson, from a championship kick boxer. Where lessons were less successful, teachers talked for long periods and set less challenging work. When this happened students began to lose interest, particularly those in Year 11, and positive attitudes and behaviour waned, slowing learning.



The academy has recognised that its provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is not serving these students well. It has appointed a head of access as part of a team of senior staff with responsibilities for inclusion. She has made a promising start in changing provision better to meet these students' needs. A more detailed analysis of progress and attainment data for these pupils is in train. The individual education plans (IEPS) of Year 7 pupils are being converted to a more helpful map of provision although there is still room to make the targets on this more specific and useful to teachers. The IEPs for other year groups are to be changed to provision maps as well. This will put the academy in a better position to hold teachers to account for planning lessons more specifically for pupils with additional learning needs, something that is a weakness currently. Most of these changes are new or still in development and as such it is too early to judge their effectiveness on the outcomes for students.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of all aspects of teaching and learning – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new academic year has seen the academy develop in a much more consistently stable atmosphere than existed previously. The firm, well-judged lead from the headteacher has helped the senior leadership team develop a sense of common purpose and collegiality in working towards this. There is clarity about leaders' roles, responsibilities and accountabilities with structures, such as regular calendared meetings, in place to support these. Expectations of middle leaders are appropriate and clear, with training planned to help realise these. Performance management linked to the academy's targets is being introduced fully this year.

An extensive teaching and learning review carried out early in this term has provided targets for improvement towards which the academy is working with determination and some evident success. The proportion of inadequate lessons seen during the visit was lower than previously although there remains a way to go to eliminate these entirely. A rigorous approach to practice which does not meet the academy's high expectations has been adopted with a broad range of support, including training and coaching, in place to foster improvement. The specialism is beginning to make headway in supporting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, with appropriate plans in place. However, it is too soon for the impact to be evident.

There has been a well-considered reorganisation of the system for the pastoral care of students. This is now structured on the basis of year groups and led by teaching staff with a clear remit for raising standards, as well as guidance leaders with responsibility for welfare. The newly implemented tracking system is designed to provide not only subject leaders but also heads of year with the information required



to ensure students make the progress of which they are capable. As yet, there has not been time for this system to have an impact on students' achievement.

The academy has thorough and effective systems for safeguarding students and ensuring their well-being. The safe recruitment of staff is assured through systems which ensure records are detailed and meticulously maintained. Staff who have responsibility for matters relating to child protection and vulnerable students are well trained and have good levels of expertise in dealing with any issues that arise. They have ensured that all staff are trained to deal properly with any safeguarding and child protection issues. Staff are further supported to follow procedures through detailed guidance provided in the staff handbook and by leaflets which direct them towards specific senior staff for advice. There has been an increase in the monitoring of provision for students who work off-site. Their attendance, progress and learning are now regularly monitored and action taken as needed.

The school site is a safe and secure place for students. The health, safety and welfare of students and staff are paramount and this is signalled in detailed policies, which are known and understood by staff. Risk assessments by the site manager and departments are regular and thorough. A recent audit of health and safety procedures in the academy achieved an excellent result. The academy has made much progress in developing good practice and has worked hard to see it implemented across both sites.

The academy continues to develop strategies to strengthen links with parents. Both the Parents' Voice forum and parent surveys are providing effective channels through which parents can communicate their ideas and concerns. This has resulted in number of improvements to provision for students. For example, the pastoral grouping was revised from the start of term in response to concerns raised via Parents' Voice. Pastoral staff are making good use of parents' consultation evenings to discover parents' views of the academy. Over two thirds of parents responded at a recent Year 7 parents' evening, with overwhelming support for how well their children had been inducted to the academy. They strongly supported the view that the academy's communication with them is good.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that the roles of all leaders are identified clearly and their responsibilities understood to increase their effectiveness – satisfactory
- Prioritise, as a matter of urgency, the safety and well-being of all students and ensure that all procedures for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements – good
- Improve communication particularly between the academy and parents and carers – good



External support

The academy's improvement partner has provided and brokered good support. Most significant has been an extensive review of teaching and learning which has provided the academy with a detailed baseline, as well as targets for improvement, against which progress will be measured early next term. In addition, the academy continues to benefit from the regular support of experienced consultants who are working alongside the senior leadership team, for instance, in developing the tracking system and in improving teaching and learning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of the morning tutor periods to better prepare students for learning throughout the day.