

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

25 June 2010

Mr R Wallace
Headteacher
Richard Rose Central Academy
Edgehill Road
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA1 3SL

Dear Mr Wallace

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Academy

Following my visit with Caroline Broomhead HMI, Patrick Geraghty HMI, and additional inspectors Jim Kidd and Lyn Field, to your academy on 23 and 24 June 2010, 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 fourth 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, and the academy's advisor at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Richard Rose Central Academy

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 23-24 June 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work including 43 lessons and five registration periods; scrutinised documents; and met with the deputy headteacher, the Principal of 14 to 19 education, the Chief Executive of the Federation, staff, groups of students, and representatives of parents and carers.

Context

At the time of the monitoring visit, students in Years 11 and 13 had completed their external examinations and left the academy. Year 10 students were sitting examinations so observations were of lessons in Years 7 to 9 and Year 12.

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

The system for tracking students' attainment is gradually becoming embedded as a source of essential data about their learning. Students' performance is carefully analysed to identify those in need of support, with a particular focus on Year 10 and increasingly on Year 9. However, the reliability of assessment information remains an area for development. The academy recognises that the setting of examination papers requires refinement, particularly at Key Stage 3, to ensure that assessment is comparable across subjects. At present, departments gather and record data about the progress of students in a variety of ways. This lack of consistency makes the strategic use of the information, for instance in summary form, less straightforward than it should be. Lesson observations show that the use of data in planning learning is variable in degree and effectiveness.

Sixth form

Since the last monitoring visit, sixth form leaders and managers have further developed and refined systems to track, monitor and inform interventions to increase students' attainment and progress. Pastoral care, support and guidance systems have improved and additional support opportunities for students have widened. Leaders and staff are clearer about lines of responsibility and accountability. An increasing proportion of staff identify more firmly with a developing sixth-form ethos and culture. Leaders demonstrate a good understanding of the sixth form's strengths and weaknesses and the journey required to improve attainment and progress further. Students speak well of the pastoral support they receive and regard their positive relationships with staff as a strength. The advice and guidance for students on future employment and higher education opportunities

are improving and the academy is enhancing this through the addition of a progression week.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The students report improvements to behaviour around the academy over the past year. They say the academy is calmer and that they are able to concentrate better in lessons. They appreciate the extra adults who are available to help them in lessons. Senior leaders monitor patterns of incidents closely and are proactive in taking steps to avert potential disruption to learning, for example through additional support for individuals in lessons where difficulties regularly occur. Other interventions, targeted at particular groups identified as having persistent behaviour difficulties, are having a positive impact in lessons generally. For example, a group of 20 students from Year 8 are now being taught as a separate class with an adapted curriculum: this is having a positive impact on their behaviour and has re-engaged them in learning. Fixed term exclusions are monitored carefully and staff are clear about where strategies have led to individual improvements. However, the number of students involved in fixed term exclusions remains high.

The pastoral support team is being given a clearer role and encouraged to take ownership of improving behaviour in their designated year groups. They monitor the use of 'reflection' rooms and provide supervision around school. Their role in liaising with families now has greater prominence and is reported to be having a positive effect on relationships between parents and carers and the academy. Pastoral and teaching staff are working together more closely to manage challenging behaviour in a positive and constructive manner. Professional development opportunities have raised awareness of strategies that can be used to diffuse potentially difficult situations, such as adopting non-confrontational approaches. The academy is also focusing its attention on building relationships and is using restorative practice to encourage students to take more responsibility for their behaviour.

Behaviour around the academy, between lessons and at breaks is generally satisfactory. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are better when lessons are planned carefully so that students are given clear instructions about what is expected of them and can get on with tasks without having to rely on individual adult guidance throughout the lesson. The pairing of students to help each other was also seen to be an effective strategy in promoting positive attitudes and independent learning skills. Weak literacy skills clearly have a negative impact on students' self-esteem and their willingness to engage in learning. The academy is well aware of this and is taking positive steps to address weaknesses, for example through literacy intervention and individual support programmes.

Attendance continues to improve slowly but, although the gap is narrowing, figures remain low. Senior staff have taken stock of the reasons for this and major changes have been made to the way poor attendance is managed. It is now seen as a

symptom of deeper issues and as part of the responsibility of all staff in monitoring students. These expectations are made clear in the new handbook and from September, the academy will set up its own attendance panels as and when they are needed. Actions, such as a focus day on attendance, have proved fruitful in identifying where the academy could access specialist support independently and avoid reliance on the timescales of other organisations. Data now identify the attendance of specific groups but this is in its infancy and yet to inform staff about exactly where intervention is needed.

Arrival at the academy in time for lessons has improved but in some classes the attitude of some students to punctuality is still too casual. This is despite the high presence of staff at lesson changeovers. Although teachers promote good punctuality with their students, there is inconsistency in the actions taken and so the promptness with which students settle to task varies.

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

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous monitoring visit. This is primarily as a result of the effective work of the Teaching and Learning Group, which places considerable emphasis on both professional development and support for staff. The 'Shopping List' initiative continues to have a positive impact on encouraging staff to share their expertise with others across the academy and staff also speak highly of the 'Outstanding Teacher' programme. Staff are now taking more responsibility for improving their own pedagogical skills and are beginning to identify where exemplary practice exists across the curriculum.

In the most impressive lessons, teachers' questioning requires students to think more deeply about the subject-matter and encourages them to find things out for themselves. In history, for example, an ongoing dialogue between teacher and students and between students themselves resulted in a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of propaganda during the Second World War: students were astonished at what they had been able to achieve. Similarly, the aspirations and self-esteem of students in a Year 7 mathematics lesson were raised when they were required to research how they would answer a question in a recent GCSE examination paper.

The academy recognises, however, that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning remain. Challenge is variable and, on occasions, teachers direct

learning too much. The pace of learning slows and students are often passive as a result. There is also a variability in the quality, extent and regularity of marking and students are, therefore, not always fully aware of what they need to do to improve their work. There is also inconsistency in behaviour management and, in a minority of lessons, inappropriate conduct hampers learning.

The newly appointed head of inclusion is providing clear direction and vision for provision and outcomes for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Her collaborative style is building staff confidence and encouraging ownership of plans for improvement. An action plan has been produced which shows appropriate targets and reasonable timescales for implementation. Although it is early days in terms of the impact on the outcomes for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, some significant steps have been taken in the right direction. For example, work is underway to build the expertise, confidence and capacity of higher level teaching assistants. They have been given a clearer and more prominent role in managing teaching assistants and leading intervention work. The deployment of teaching assistants has improved with a sharper focus on identified needs. More clarity is emerging regarding the role they are expected to play in supporting students in mainstream lessons.

The importance of ongoing professional development is recognised. Teachers' awareness of different special educational needs, for example autism, and the implications for planning and teaching is improving, with some sharing of ideas and good practice taking place. The academy is moving towards both more accurate identification of students' additional needs and more information about their prior attainment and the progress they are making. This is raising expectations for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and in some subjects teachers are able to be more specific about whether students are progressing as well as their peers.

Significant intervention work is being undertaken to address weaknesses in basic literacy skills; the academy fully understands the positive impact this will have on students' self-esteem and their willingness to engage in learning. Subject leaders are becoming more involved in tracking and analysing students' outcomes, although this is at an early stage. As yet, senior leaders are unable to provide summary data or analysis of outcomes for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including attendance, exclusions, attainment and progress.

The quality of tutorial periods has improved. A weekly programme of purposeful and enjoyable activities is in place which, when combined with checks on equipment and planners, help to prepare students for learning. Improvements in attendance are recognised during tutorials but not always with the high profile and enthusiasm needed to convey the importance of this for students' learning and their chances of gaining good qualifications.

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 senior leadership team has been reshaped and enlarged in order to spread responsibilities more efficiently. Increasingly, responsibilities at all levels are being aligned so that these match the structures required once the academy moves to its new building and ways of working. Where appropriate, for example, in the leadership of inclusion, federation staff are being deployed to good effect to bring additional expertise and strength to the team. In the case of inclusion, in only a short period the positive impact on all aspects of this work has been marked.

Leaders have tackled the priorities from the last monitoring visit with vigour and determination. The impact is beginning to be evident in the increasing proportion of satisfactory or better lessons. The Teaching and Learning Group has a thorough grasp of strengths and weaknesses in lessons and is providing well-targeted support to teachers to improve classroom practice. The academy has drawn well on external expertise to evaluate the quality of middle leadership and to provide support to accelerate the rate of its development, particularly in the core subjects. A number of strategies are in place to improve the impact of middle leaders on the quality of provision. For instance, the introduction of weekly meetings of senior and middle leaders, focused on establishing secure quality assurance systems, is providing a helpful forum for fostering and sharing good practice.

The sports specialism is having a positive impact both on the academy's provision and in developing the academy's community profile. Sports staff have worked with a range of subjects to improve the management of tracking, monitoring and intervention strategies to promote better progress. Developmental work in managing students' behaviour and outward bound activities are contributing to improving students' attitudes and application. A range of community links includes sports clubs, family learning activities and work with primary schools. The science specialism is not having a sufficient impact on the work of the academy.

The improved lines of communication between the academy and parents have been further embedded. There has been a significant shift in the tone of the relationship and parents feel that a greater level of trust exists. They are of the view that any issues raised will be taken seriously and given due weight in decision making. Members of the Parents' Voice group have played a key role in working with the academy staff to improve response time to telephone calls and it is now rare for complaints to be received about these systems. There is unanimous appreciation for the detail contained in the new progress reports and a much higher proportion of parents are attending both consultation meetings and sessions for particular groups of students.

The governing body is carrying the vision for the academy and the federation forward. Plans for the technological infrastructure and move to the new building are increasing in urgency and profile. The potential of the new facilities is raising enthusiasm among staff and students who have had the opportunity to visit the site. One Year 9 student described the new building as 'our second home'. Many prospective students and their parents took up the recent invitation to visit the new building and see what the academy will have to offer.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure the roles of leaders are identified clearly and their responsibilities understood to increase their effectiveness – satisfactory
- Improve communication particularly between the academy and parents and carers – satisfactory

External support

The academy is using the support and expertise of both the School Improvement Partner and external consultants effectively to analyse the strengths and areas for development in middle leadership and to establish viable ways forward in improving this. The impact of support for developments in the academy's approach to inclusion has been very positive. The federation continues to provide a range of valued support, for instance with the organisation of work experience for Year 10 students.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Increase the quality and consistency of marking so that students are fully aware of what they need to do to improve their progress.
- Establish a consistent method for recording and evaluating students' progress.