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6 March 2015

Mr R Lewis
Headteacher
The Peak Academy
Drake Lane
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Dear Mr Lewis

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Peak Academy

Following my visit with Andrew Penman and Julie Dyer, Additional inspectors, to your academy on 4 March 2015, 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place June 2014. 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. As at the previous inspection, it was conducted jointly with the second monitoring inspection of The Greenfield Academy. This is because the students are taught alongside the students at The Greenfield Academy under the same leadership, management and governance. Again, as previously, the lead inspectors worked closely together to support the leadership team in managing the two inspections and produced almost identical reports.

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 am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in any key stage provided they are mentored by an appropriate senior leader.

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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2014

- Improve teaching to good or better by:
 - raising expectations of the level and amount of work students can produce
 - developing teachers' skills in checking students' understanding during lessons and adapting the work, their questions and the pace of learning so that all make good progress
 - sharing the best practice in marking students' work and helping them to know how to improve it.
- Improve achievement, especially at Key Stage 4, by:
 - extending students' skills in communication, including reading and writing, and in mathematics across all subjects
 - using the pupil premium funding specifically to enable eligible students to catch up with others.
- Improve students' behaviour and attendance by:
 - raising the expectations of staff and making sure they consistently apply agreed strategies for managing behaviour, including the use of rewards and sanctions
 - reviewing the curriculum so that it meets students' needs, interests and aspirations.
- Increase the capacity of the leadership team to bring about rapid improvement by:
 - appointing and developing leaders and managers with responsibility for specific areas of improvement, across Key Stages 3 and 4, producing, monitoring and evaluating a clear plan for improvement that is shared with all staff and governors.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and visited 13 lessons. They met with senior and middle leaders, class teachers, the Academy Council and the Director for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities from the Academies Enterprise Trust.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit of November 2014, the academy is in the process of changing sponsor from the Academies Enterprise Trust to The White Horse Federation.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The progress gaps in English and mathematics between those students eligible for the pupil premium funding and their classmates remain too wide. These gaps are widest in Key Stage 4 and in English throughout the academy. The academy is aware of the deficiencies and is taking appropriate steps to resolve them. The academy has conducted an audit of the pupil premium funding spending. Leaders have identified more individualised ways of spending the money. It is too soon to judge the impact of these changes on students' achievements overall, but case studies for individual students show an improving picture academically and personally.

Students' communication skills are now being extended better during social activities and during lessons. Specialist classrooms such as those for the teaching of resistant materials, food technology and art have key subject-specific vocabulary displayed and explained on the display walls. However, not all teachers make best use of these resources in lessons.

A legacy of poor teaching and consistent underachievement in the past has meant that students in Key Stage 4 have needed to make up the most ground in their learning and social skills. The appointment of a Key Stage 4 manager has been successful in improving the academy's curriculum and quality of teaching for students in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum has been adapted so that it better reflects the needs, interests and aspirations of each individual student. Academy information shows that these changes have improved students' attendance. Students' potential achievement by the end of the year has also improved. In Year 11, just over 80% are on track to leave with a qualification in mathematics, with 75% in English. In addition, half of the students in Year 11 are on track to leave with accredited qualifications in five subjects.

The quality of teaching

Academy records, students' work and inspectors' observations show that the quality of teaching is improving rapidly. Coaching to help weaker teaching improve is raising expectations of adults and students about the amount and quality of work that students should be producing in lessons. Teachers are checking students' understanding during lesson more systematically and with greater frequency. This and the use of better questions to determine students' knowledge are enabling teachers to adjust the work they have given students during the lesson so that it matches their needs more accurately. Consequently, students are more interested in their work, behaving better in lessons and making better progress than previously seen.

Marking and the information given to students about how to improve their work have got better. Teachers are consistently employing a revised and more appropriate method to record how well students have achieved. This links directly to the new teaching approach initiated last term. These new ways of working have been successful in ensuring that teachers' planning and recording have improved and are consistent throughout the academy. From this information, leaders are better placed to measure the impact of staff training and to determine where future training and support are needed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' attendance continues to improve. The academy has worked closely with families to help them ensure that their child attends as often as they should. Improvements to the quality of teaching and a more appropriate and exciting curriculum are encouraging students to want to attend school.

The pastoral manager, although not long in post, has reinforced and developed the 'incentive and consequences' schemes used in the academy. These are now consistently applied. The 'VIP lounge' for break times is seen by students as a good inducement to behave and learn well in lessons. Inspectors noted how well the students behaved in the 'lounge' and the warm and friendly relationships that were established between students and the staff. Good social and interaction skills are being developed, with students demonstrating courtesy and respect for their surroundings and each other. Students were observed being sensible with their hot drinks, eating their food politely and clearing up considerately at the end of break.

In a few lessons, students still make poor choices about how to behave when they get anxious or frustrated. Teachers respond quickly to inappropriate outbursts and other staff are used effectively to defuse most situations. When students remove themselves from class, teachers discretely inform other staff so that they can supervise the 'removed' student. This ensures that interruptions to the learning of

other students is minimised. In addition, the 'removed' student is quickly calmed and speedily returned to class, generally in a frame of mind ready to learn again.

There have been no exclusions since November 2014. The academy is using a range of suitable strategies that is helping to reduce the amount and intensity of incidents that occur. Any incident is evaluated rigorously so that practice is safe, appropriate and developed in the light of findings. Where a student has needed to be held by an adult, in order to keep themselves or those around them safe, staff now have a personal handling plan. Each handling plan includes de-escalation strategies and recovery activities. This now ensures that staff treat students in a pre-agreed way, providing consistency of approach based on what works best for each individual student.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Academy leaders are making sure that the core skills in literacy and numeracy now have greater focus and emphasis across the curriculum. However, lessons are not planned as smartly as they could be to target the gaps in knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics for individual students. In particular, there is an absence of mathematics being specifically taught or reinforced in practical, real-life ways in most subjects, reducing students' ability to apply what they have learned. The lack of precision and cross-curriculum application reduces the speed that students can catch up with their learning in English and mathematics.

The new appointments since September 2014 have ensured that there is a wider range of leaders and managers with specific responsibility for key areas of the academy. They have received good quality induction programmes and support for their roles. The impact of their expertise and skills in raising student achievement and of their ability to rapidly drive academy improvement in a new school environment is in many cases too soon to judge. However, the skill set in the new teams is complementary and all staff have a very clear idea of how to follow the academy action plan and what they must do to fulfil it and meet their responsibilities. Inspectors found that staff morale is very high, with staff reporting an 'excellent team spirit' and determination to make Peak and Greenfield the very best schools they can be, following the academy motto of 'To make our best better'.

Governors have continued to visit the academy and have discussions with staff related to their areas of responsibility. They continue as individuals, and as a whole, to have a clear understanding about the current strengths and areas that need rapid improvement. They have been very supportive of the headteacher and ensured that the appraisal system is robustly holding all staff to account for the work they do in the academy.

External support

The academy has continued to receive good quality support from the Academies Enterprise Trust, with leaders from partnership schools being successfully used to help train staff and share best practice. There have been regular external moderations of assessments in English and mathematics to ensure that academy information is accurate. Subject leaders are increasingly demonstrating their capacity to instigate academy improvement. Consequently, the academy is working in closer partnership with other education providers and needing less support.