

PROTECT - INSPECTION

Nord Anglia Inspections
Anglia House
Carrs Road
Cheadle
Stockport
SK8 2LA

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 491 4191
Direct F 0161 491 4409



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

Dear Mr Wallace

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Richard Rose Central Academy

Following my visit with Eric Craven HMI, Andrew Johnson HMI, and additional inspectors Andrew Henderson and Mary Sewell to your academy on 3 and 4 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first 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**

Newly qualified teachers **may not be appointed.**

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 from the DCSF.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Richard Rose Central Academy

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3–4 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work including 35 lessons, two registrations and one assembly; scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, groups of students, parents, and the chief executive of the federation.

Context

Since the academy was placed in special measures, the chief executive of the federation and the academy's director have stepped down. New appointments to these posts were made at the beginning of February. An additional member of the senior leadership team, initially seconded from the partner academy, has been appointed. In addition, there has been an internal promotion to the senior leadership team. At the time of the inspection students in Years 11 and 13 were sitting external examinations and most Year 12 students were on study leave.

Achievement and standards

The academy has focused with some success on improving outcomes for Year 11 students. A range of strategies such as course changes and the use of functional tests, as well as targeted interventions including Saturday schools and extra-curricular revision sessions, have been employed. The academy's data indicate that this year's GCSE results are likely to be at least in line with those of similar schools. On some measures results are expected to be close to the academy's challenging targets which aim to place it in the top quarter of similar schools.

Nevertheless, inspectors agree with the academy's own evaluation of students' achievement overall as inadequate this academic year. A number of factors have contributed to this including the poor behaviour and negative attitudes to learning exhibited by a significant proportion of students until quite recently. These were exacerbated by the comparatively large proportion of lessons taught by temporary teachers which resulted in a lack of continuity and progression in learning. Although behaviour and attitudes have improved and staffing is more stable, there has not been enough time for these improvements to have sufficient impact on students' progress for them to regain lost ground. Additionally, the limited teaching time for core subjects in Year 7 has hampered students' progress. The academy has sound plans to amend the Year 7 curriculum from the beginning of the next academic year to address this. Inspection evidence indicates that the quality of teaching and learning is not good enough, particularly in Key Stage 3, to accelerate students' progress sufficiently to overcome their legacy of underachievement.

With effective support from external consultants, the academy is developing a system for tracking students' progress towards their challenging targets. At present

the academy's data is incomplete so helpful plans are in place for all students in Years 7 to 10 to take suitable, externally verified tests shortly in order to identify levels of underperformance and provide a baseline from which to measure future progress. The academy recognises that training and support are needed to secure the consistency and rigour of regular assessments in all subjects so that students' progress can be assessed accurately and underachievement identified swiftly.

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form was not evaluated at the time of the inspection. Senior leaders at the academy judge the sixth form to be inadequate and added it to the areas for improvement in the post inspection action plan.

There are 146 students in Year 12 and 95 in Year 13. On entry to the sixth form most students have attained examination points scores below the national average. The academy is not able to provide a detailed analysis or evaluation of the progress students make. Based on what evidence there is, many students underperform and are not predicted to reach their full potential in AS and A level examinations. Senior leaders predict that the overall pass rates this year will be low in comparison to national averages, with few high grades. The proportion of students who were retained to the end of their studies is low, particularly in Year 12. The system to record attendance and punctuality is inadequate and does not provide an accurate basis upon which to identify who is present in the sixth form building.

Academy lesson observation records show a wide variation in the quality of lessons with too little good or better teaching and learning. Inspectors observed some good teaching particularly in physical education (PE). Some lessons are adversely affected by the poor quality of accommodation and noise from the nearby building site. There has been little analysis of common strengths and areas for improvement in lessons. The academy has recognised that the curriculum is too narrow and based largely on academic programmes that do not meet the needs of a significant proportion of students. Class sizes vary significantly and some groups are very small. Entry requirements to the sixth form promote an inclusive approach: however this means that extensive additional academic support is necessary. This academic support is largely unavailable or ineffective.

Students are very loyal to the head of sixth form and speak very positively about the pastoral support they received this year. However, students expressed serious concerns about the quality of lessons and their current facilities. Senior leaders have focused on improving standards and behaviour in the main school and until recently little attention has been paid to the effectiveness of the sixth form. However, leaders recognise that root and branch reform is necessary to improve the overall effectiveness of the sixth form. Plans are in place to create a federated sixth form with the partner academy from September. The director of 14-19 education has set a strategic agenda and laid out plans to restructure management responsibilities but specific targets linked to measurable improvements in achievement are not in place.

The process of self-assessment is inadequate; value added data is rarely used effectively by teachers or managers.

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour and attitudes are improving as a result of a more consistent application by staff of the newly introduced protocol for managing students' behaviour. A line in the sand was drawn when the headteacher introduced a revised set of rules, consequences and rewards in April 2009 and staff have generally implemented these well. However, some inconsistency remains in their application and students say this is particularly the case when they are taught by staff who do not know them well. Regardless, students are now clear about what is unacceptable behaviour and they understand what will happen if they misbehave. Because behaviour is less troublesome and more effectively managed, teachers are now able to focus much more on the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently students' attitudes to learning are improving although many still have some way to go to show enthusiasm for learning. At the very least they are compliant and cooperative in lessons and in the best lessons, where they are captured by the topic and activities, their attitudes towards their learning are upbeat.

The academy has a suitable and escalating range of responses when students misbehave including warnings, movement to other classes, spending time in the reflection room and internal exclusion when necessary. Good evidence to show the effectiveness of these responses is that the number of students given fixed-period exclusions is dropping, as is the number of sessions being lost to exclusion. Students value the merit system that earns them rewards but say that this too can be inconsistently applied at times. They feel some awards are undeserved and other students are not duly recognised which they find frustrating and unfair. Senior staff are using the data they gather on students' misdemeanours and rewards to identify the reasons why students might be misbehaving. A range of interventions is available to support those in need including counselling and anger management. Because monitoring of the behaviour management system and data gathering are in their infancy, staff are not yet in a position to evaluate fully the overall effectiveness of the management of behaviour arrangements. Nevertheless a promising start has been made.

Although attendance has improved from a very low point earlier this year, the overall rate of attendance remains stubbornly low at around 88.5%. This adversely contributes to underachievement as it equates to the equivalent of three and a half weeks lost to learning for each student every year. Plenty of information is collected about students' attendance and there are a range of strategies employed to help deal with absence issues. However, these are not applied with enough rigour to crack this thorny problem. Not all staff give appropriate attention to attendance and punctuality and as a consequence some students do not see this as the imperative it should be. For example, all students have attendance targets but too many do not

recall having had discussions with staff about these. The impact of the attendance team is lessened by its currently reduced capacity although there are plans to increase this from the start of next term. A system to track and respond quickly to internal truancy has very recently been introduced and arrangements have been changed to deal with students who are late in the morning. It is too early to judge whether these are having the desired effect. The academy expects to fall far short of its targets for attendance overall and for reducing persistent absence. Attendance, punctuality and internal truancy need to be prioritised further so that teachers, students, families and the community see them as imperatives.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the behaviour and attitudes of students by building relationships and applying agreed procedures consistently – **satisfactory**

- Improve attendance and punctuality to lessons - **inadequate**

Quality of provision

Progress in improving teaching and learning has been slow to get underway but is now gaining momentum. A suitable action plan is in place. Early initiatives, such as the introduction of a common lesson planning format and ensuring that students are aware of what they will learn in lessons, are providing a more consistent approach to lessons. Improvements in managing behaviour are also contributing to this progress. A regular cycle of lesson monitoring by senior staff is underway, and this is helping to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. Where needed, teachers are provided with suitable support and opportunities to improve. Subject leaders are beginning to play their part in this through reviews of work and planning, but not all are regularly checking on the quality of teaching and learning in their areas. Since the inspection, many of the supply teachers have been replaced by permanent staff, bringing improved stability and continuity in teaching. As a result, the academy is better placed to reinforce a uniform approach to both classroom management and lesson structure.

Despite these efforts, the present picture is one of inconsistency in teaching and learning. Around a third of lessons seen during this monitoring visit were good, predominantly in Year 10: none were outstanding. Almost one fifth of lessons seen were inadequate, mainly in Years 7 to 9. As the academy recognises, improvements made in teaching and learning are not yet sufficient.

In lessons where students make good progress, expectation is high and teachers provide a variety of challenging tasks that proceed at a brisk pace. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and understand how students learn. They question students well to ensure that they think for themselves and can explain their understanding. Students are clear about what it is they are learning and why. Work takes account of assessment information about students' progress and is suitably

matched to their differing needs. As a result, in these most successful lessons, students' confidence and enthusiasm for tackling their work is high.

Where teaching is less effective, and sometimes inadequate, too little demand is made of students. Activities are mundane and often teacher-dominated. Consequently students lose interest and show, at best, a passive attitude to their work. Too many lessons reflect a 'one size fits all' approach, so that work is not well matched to students' differing levels of ability. Learning objectives are unclear and too often describe what students are going to do rather than what they are going to learn. There is little evidence of any link between learning objectives and the ways in which work will be assessed. While students have a secure knowledge of their target levels or grades, they are less confident in understanding how to improve their work. In too many lessons, the final part is not used well to ensure that students are clear about what they have learned, and what they need to do next. Marking is regular, although variable in its support of learning.

An enthusiastic volunteer working group, led by a senior staff member, has begun to focus on strategies to strengthen teaching and learning. It would benefit from a more prominent role in identifying, promoting and sharing the best practice that can be seen across the academy, for example, in art, PE, music, and history.

The academy has taken very seriously the issues around the safety and well-being of students. About 100 closed circuit television cameras have been fitted around the buildings and site. Fire regulations and health and safety requirements are met and there are 25 first aid stations situated throughout the academy. Parents spoken to say that students now feel safe, listened to and well supported and most students interviewed agree. The academy has addressed concerns over safety on the buses by erecting a safety barrier and by employing additional staff to supervise the journeys on selected routes. The arrival and departure of students is now well supervised. Teachers on duty give them a warm welcome as they arrive and make a note of latecomers. Students and staff report that there is less disruptive behaviour in and beyond the classroom because all know exactly what is expected of them and sanctions are now more consistently imposed. Corridors are generally orderly, well-supervised and clean. The academy has listened to staff and parental concerns in respect of lunchtime facilities. An additional dining area, outdoor benches and a pleasant secure area have been provided for students who take packed lunches. This has resulted in a calmer more orderly lunchtime. The academy buildings provide a much better environment and this has contributed to increasingly positive attitudes and improved morale.

Students who attend college and alternative education providers on a part-time basis as part of their full time 'package' of education have their provision monitored and reviewed effectively. However, the planning, monitoring and review arrangements for the 29 students who are currently on reduced timetables for various reasons lack sufficient rigour.

Child Protection is managed by senior staff and safeguarding procedures have improved. Safeguarding measures now meet statutory requirements including appropriate recruitment and vetting checks. Safeguarding policies are in place and are being appropriately monitored and evaluated.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of all aspects of teaching and learning - **inadequate**
- Prioritise, as a matter of urgency, the safety and well-being of all students and ensure that all procedures for the safeguarding of students meet statutory requirements – **satisfactory**

Leadership and management

The arrival of the headteacher in February signalled the beginning of a period of relentless hard work to address the academy's priorities. Under his leadership much has improved in a very short period. The headteacher has successfully stabilised a volatile climate, prioritising effectively so that students feel safe and learning can take place. His energetic lead and high visibility around the academy are valued by staff, students and parents. The establishment of a calm working atmosphere has had a positive impact on staff morale so that levels of absence have reduced markedly from a high point earlier this year. Nonetheless, the academy recognises that more work is required to improve this further as well as stabilise the staffing establishment.

The headteacher is providing the academy with a clear sense of direction and has begun to implement appropriate systems to deliver this. A pragmatic revision of leadership and management structures is underway, based on a realistic appraisal of the academy's needs together with its current capacity. Within this, the responsibilities of senior leaders have been reviewed so that lines of accountability are clear. Helpfully, support and coaching are in place to assist senior leaders in their new roles and in building capacity, for example, in the development and application of data systems. The roles of middle leaders are also being revised to ensure effective and efficient responses to students' needs and to increase the synergy between pastoral and academic monitoring. These sensible changes are underway so it is too early to evaluate their impact. The academy is working hard to develop a full range of policies and procedures and to achieve consistency in their application. Some successes are evident in this regard, for instance in the use of a common lesson plan and the implementation of the behaviour policy.

The impact of the academy's specialisms on its improvement is uneven: it is significantly stronger for sport than for science. PE makes a strong contribution both through academic standards and through the part played in promoting students' personal development and well-being. The curriculum is broadened through the range of courses offered. Strategies to share best practice, and to coach, mentor, and support staff in improving the quality of lessons across the

academy are emerging. However, the management and profile of the specialisms require strengthening to increase their impact on the academy's improvement.

Communications with parents have improved. Parents interviewed are positive and pleased about the improved communications between them and the academy; they are able to take their concerns directly to the headteacher. A group formed by parents in response to their children's concerns, 'The Parent Voice', has established some core values to ensure that all students are treated fairly, with dignity and in a safe environment. Parents in the group are pleased that it has been successful in opening up channels of communication and now feel their views are listened to and acted upon. There are opportunities for parents to learn about life in the academy and give opinions via the internet and suggestion boxes around the academy.

Governance is becoming established with suitable committee structures now in place. Governors are providing an increasing level of challenge and monitoring progress against the action plan. The impact of this monitoring and evaluation is currently hindered by the action plan's focus on processes rather than outcomes for students.

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**
- Improve communication, particularly between the academy and parents and carers
– **good**

External support

The academy has identified the support it requires and employed highly experienced consultants to work on a day-to-day basis with staff. Support is well-focused and contributes positively to the development of the academy's systems and staff capacity. The academy values the support received from the Department for Children Schools and Families and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is at least satisfactory.