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1 April 2011

Mr P Sampson
Headteacher
Walbottle Campus
Hexham Road
Walbottle
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
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NE15 9TP

Dear Mr Sampson,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Walbottle Campus

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Jim Bennetts and Gordon Potter, additional inspectors, on 31 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff and students we talked with, to the Chair of the Governing Body and your School Improvement Partner, who all attended meetings at short notice.

Since the last inspection there has been a reorganisation of leadership responsibilities, including the appointment of a new Head of Inclusion and Head of Sixth Form. The Key Stage 4 pastoral system has been reorganised. The senior leadership team is in the process of being further restructured.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 October 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

From a low base in 2008 the school is making sustained improvement to where it should be in terms of attainment and progress. Since the last inspection attainment at Key Stage 4 has risen. The proportion of students attaining 5 GCSE grades A* to C in 2010 improved to 73%, although the proportion gaining 5A* to C grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, remained low at 40%. The school's robust monitoring systems show that Year 11 students are on track for further improvements in their GCSE results in 2011 and the number of Year 11 students who have already attained a C grade or better in English and/or mathematics has increased significantly when compared to the same period in 2010. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers. Teachers

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

regularly monitor students to check progress against target grades and students have a much better understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now average. The school has been imaginative in seeking to encourage good attendance and reducing persistent absence through the 'Family Support' and 'Teaching in the Community' programmes, working with parents and carers to ensure that they recognise the link between good attendance and higher levels of achievement. The school's specialist status has broadened curriculum options with the development of vocational courses in hairdressing, construction and animal care and the introduction of a range of sporting academies. The school is a calm and orderly environment where students behave well and where relationships between students and staff are positive. The 'POLITE' positive behaviour system is now embedded with students, staff and parents and carers and the new school uniform is respected by students.

The headteacher had been in post for two months at the time of the school's inspection in 2009. Work started at that time has developed appropriately and the new senior leadership team has a clear vision for the school's future and is demonstrating improved capacity to deliver sustainable improvement. Leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and challenge where appropriate. Detailed school planning now includes criteria through which progress can be monitored. Self-evaluation is more robust and the school is clear on the weaknesses which need to be dealt with and the barriers which have to be overcome to improve outcomes further for students. However, there still remain weaknesses in certain areas and the progress of students in some subjects, including mathematics, is still weak. Although staff understand the need for rapid improvements in key areas, there are a number who are not yet actively engaged in the process. The school has recognised these inconsistencies and is taking appropriate action to secure improvements in areas of underperformance.

The measures to improve teaching are having a positive demonstrable impact. Extensive opportunities for professional development are welcomed by teachers. The proportion of good or better lessons has increased and staff have a clearer understanding of students' targets. New approaches to planning lessons are being piloted, including the use of 'Cooperative Learning Champions' within departments to support the development of open-ended questioning, students' self- and peer-assessment and presentation of students' work. Middle leaders, teachers and students speak enthusiastically about progress in these areas and the impact that the changes are having. In the most effective lessons, teachers have high expectations for students and set challenging tasks. In these lessons, teachers assess the needs of their students quickly and precisely, and adapt what they do to ensure all students understand and make good progress. In less-effective lessons, work is not planned well enough to challenge or meet the needs and prior attainment of all students or the quality of written and oral feedback to students is variable so, as a result, students are not always aware of their targets or how to achieve them. The school recognises that in many lessons there is a lack of formative assessment to enable effective differentiation and school planning indicates that extensive development work in this area is scheduled.

The school has appreciated the significant support it has received from the School Improvement Partner and the local authority. It acknowledges that this advice and guidance is effectively strengthening the work of leaders and managers at all levels across the school, as well as individual members of staff. The governing body is effective in holding all leaders to account and on the issues which will help the school to improve, in particular in relation to teaching and standards.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures by scrutinising the single central record and found this to be secure.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

David Brown
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 13 to 14 October 2009

- Improve the challenge provided to all students in lessons so that:
 - teachers' use of open-ended questions leads to classroom discussion of work
 - there are more opportunities for students' self- and peer-evaluation of their work to develop their analytical and critical skills
 - students are encouraged to present their work or justify their views and ideas to the whole class or groups in order to build self-confidence and develop speaking skills.
- Ensure that the assessment of students' work is used consistently and well across all subjects particularly English and mathematics, so that:
 - teachers always have high expectations of students
 - this information is always used to structure learning activities through lesson planning which is demanding of all groups, helping students to make the best possible progress in their lessons
 - marking always informs students of what they have to improve.
- Ensure the leadership team's monitoring and review strategies within plans for improvement:
 - include agreed milestones and measurable success criteria
 - include subsequent actions if success criteria are not met and use these to inform future priorities in improvement planning.