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Mr David Hulbert
Interim Headteacher
High Well School – South Hiendley
High Well Hill Lane
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Hulbert

Special measures monitoring inspection of High Well School – South Hiendley

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2013, 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, staff, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, two Year 8 students and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, it has been agreed that the interim headteacher will lead the school until at least December 2013. The substantive deputy headteacher has returned to school. One teacher is absent long term due to ill health.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has led a brisk start to making the improvements required. The roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders have been clarified and rationalised. This has helped leaders to make an assured beginning on developments in their areas of responsibility. A valued partnership with two local special schools has been established rapidly and sharing systems, processes and expertise is enhancing the school's capacity.

Improving behaviour has been a central focus of this term's work, with time dedicated to training that closely matches the school's needs. A graduated approach to dealing with challenging behaviour has been established. A staff working party has devised a new reward system which emphasises the positives in students' behaviour through awarding points. Students spoken to understand the points system, like the opportunities they have to choose gifts, and say this motivates them to improve their conduct. In addition, an internal exclusion room has been introduced. The steps taken are already paying dividends, evident in a reduction in the number of serious incidents this term and a fall in exclusions. The calmer atmosphere is having a positive impact on attendance, which has risen this term. The school's relentless approach to tackling low attendance continues, now with more systematic recording of all the strategies employed.

Systems for regular evaluation of the school's performance are being established. Data on students' achievement have been centralised and regular assessment points during the year agreed. Targets set in the action plan are suitably challenging. Working with other local schools to moderate assessments has given leaders confidence in the accuracy of information on students' achievement. Subject reviews are under way, with action plans being drawn up to deal with the improvements required. Regular learning walks take place; those planned for the autumn term are carefully targeted so that the impact of training can be evaluated.

The curriculum and opportunities for accreditation have been mapped for every student. An increasing number of vocational courses are planned for next year. These include a qualification in fire fighting, following the successful trial this term of a short course introducing these skills. A more structured approach to supporting those students with very weak basic skills has been established. In preparation for the next academic year, sensible plans are in place for fewer teachers to work with younger students, following a curriculum which delivers a range of subjects through carefully planned topics.

The local authority commissioned an audit of governance following the inspection and this is informing appointments of additional governors, focusing on the expertise they are able to offer. The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body is linking governors to areas for improvement to enable them to build up more detailed knowledge of these and target more sharply their visits to the school. The governing body's committees are effectively arranged to meet the school's needs.

The local authority has provided considerable, well-targeted support to the school, which is paying dividends. Swift action was taken to establish baselines from which targets for improvement could be set, as well as broker the partnership with local special schools. Staff from the local authority's inclusion services have provided support, including through a full-time secondment. The school's improvement adviser has established a tight system for coordinating support to the school, and effective mechanisms for the regular monitoring and evaluation of progress are well established.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector