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Mr Will Carpenter
Headteacher
High Well School - South Hiendley
High Well Hill Lane
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Carpenter

Special measures monitoring inspection of High Well School - South Hiendley

Following my visit to your school on 8 April 2014, 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 and the Corporate Director, Children and Young People for Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve teaching to be consistently good or better in order to raise achievement rapidly across all year groups, by:
 - developing teachers' knowledge and skills so that in all subjects they plan their lessons using methods that engage, challenge and give all students the scope to take charge of their own learning and the motivation to work hard
 - raising teachers' expectations in relation to students' behaviour, their cooperation and positive contribution to lessons
 - increasing the pace of learning and ensuring students are encouraged to read and write often and have good opportunities in mathematics to improve their skills in number, calculation and problem-solving
 - making the assessment of students' starting points and progress consistent in rigour and accuracy across the school
 - ensuring teachers use assessments to plan work for students that is precisely matched to their level of attainment and build systematically on what students already know and can do.

- Improve students' behaviour and attendance, by:
 - ensuring that all staff develop the insights and skills to manage students' behaviour with consistency and to good effect
 - reducing significantly the high level of exclusions prompted by students' unacceptable behaviour
 - redoubling efforts to reduce the high level of absence through the work of the family support adviser and the school's incentives to encourage good attendance.

- Improve leadership and the capacity to improve the school, by:
 - developing and implementing a comprehensive scheme of rigorous checks on the school's work especially in relation to teaching and students' outcomes
 - improving leaders' skills in observing and evaluating the quality of teaching so that they give teachers clear feedback on their areas for improvement
 - strengthening the part played by teachers' performance management and their professional development in improving teaching
 - ensuring the tracking of students' progress is accurate and clear in showing which students make expected progress and which make less or more than this, leading to an accurate judgement on the school's effectiveness in promoting good achievement
 - making more effective use of pupil premium funding
 - reviewing the curriculum and amending it as necessary to ensure it offers good opportunities for literacy and numeracy in all subjects.

- Improve governance by:
 - making sure governors are given comprehensive reports and accurate evaluations of the school's work so that they can challenge leaders effectively and set them clear expectations that will lead to improvement.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 8 April 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, a group of students, governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. A discussion was held by telephone with the local authority's director of inclusion services.

Context

The school has been led by four interim headteachers in the last two years. In January 2014, the headteacher of the Wakefield Pupil Referral Unit system was appointed as executive headteacher of High Well, bringing together leadership of this sector of the local authority's provision. The long-term sickness absence of a teacher continues. Throughout this term, English and mathematics have been taught by temporary teachers. Four learning mentors have left the school under voluntary redundancy arrangements. Although the number on roll is broadly stable, there has been considerable student mobility.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's regular tracking of students' progress shows that all Key Stage 3 students are making sufficient gains in their learning to achieve their targets in English, mathematics, science, physical education (PE), and information and communication technology (ICT). Performance at Key Stage 4 is more variable: it is strongest in ICT and PE where staffing and the quality of teaching is consistent. The school's data show that low attendance is a very significant barrier to students' progress.

The progress of Year 11 students is closely mapped by leaders to ensure that they gain as much accreditation for their work as possible. Almost all have gained a qualification in science at entry level 3 and several have a qualification in mathematics at this level. Fewer have reached this level in English but some are on track to do so by the end of the year. The aim of a student who has already gained GCSEs in English and mathematics is to improve on the grades already achieved.

A new workshop approach has been adopted for some Year 10 students who are individually supported to complete pieces of accredited coursework. The less formal environment and more flexible approach to timings are helping them to achieve more in short, focused periods of work.

Where required, students receive extra help with reading comprehension and spelling. For those who have not been absent persistently, the average increase in

reading age is 18 months, a substantial gain. It was clear in an observation of one of these short targeted sessions, that students appreciate the attractive, welcoming environment and are motivated by spelling challenges completed on electronic tablets.

The quality of teaching

Since the previous monitoring inspection, staffing issues and vacancies have impeded improvements to the quality of teaching. Consequently, in the lessons observed it was clear that some weaknesses identified previously, persist. For instance, work is not always matched closely enough to the next steps individual students need to take so it is either too easy or too difficult. Sometimes time is wasted and learning slows because teachers do not explain the purpose of lessons at the outset or give clear instructions about what they expect students to do. Checks are not made on what students have learned previously or what they are learning as the lesson progresses. Frequently, opportunities are missed to extend students' basic skills or encourage the accurate use of subject-specific vocabulary.

Where learning is more successful, it is set in a context relevant to students and they understand the purpose of the activities. They enjoy learning through practical tasks, as was evident in observations of food technology and science lessons. In a Key Stage 3 science lesson, students were given specific roles in conducting the practical activity which guided their contributions and helped them develop their collaborative skills. They understood factors in setting up a fair test and were able to identify and manage the risks to health and safety presented by the activity.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Although sometimes volatile in their attitudes, in the main students arrive at lessons ready to work. Relationships with staff are positive and this helps keep students on track during lessons. Rewards and sanctions are clear and understood by students. Increasingly flexible use is being made of the internal inclusion room, a separate space in which students work alone for varying lengths of time depending on their misdemeanour and individual needs. Leaders judge that this approach is more effective.

There has been a rise in exclusions this term compared with the same period last year. The majority of exclusions were at the beginning of the term when a number of students new to the school struggled to meet the standards expected. In addition, a more rigorous approach to discouraging smoking was introduced leading to some exclusions in the first instance.

In spite of a range of strategies employed by the school, including prosecutions, attendance remains low.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of a permanent executive headteacher has provided the stability and capacity to develop a long-term vision for the school, as well as a plan to deliver this. Leaders recognise that the plan, which is pending approval by the governing body, now requires quantifiable success criteria and tight time scales to reflect the urgency of the school's need for improvement.

Although the executive headteacher has taken a robust approach to dealing with inadequate teaching, improvements in this area are fragile and uneven. The school has had to rely on temporary staff which means that the impact of training and coaching is lost when they move on.

Work to develop an engaging curriculum which takes account of students' therapeutic, communication and academic needs, continues. The trial with younger students of a thematic approach to planning and delivering learning is being extended in the summer term to two days each week. Students say they enjoy learning this way and the school's records show a reduction in incidents of poor behaviour on the days when activities are integrated.

The governing body is increasingly well organised and well informed. Sub-committee meetings have been aligned with the school's assessment cycle so that governors can discuss students' progress on the basis of the most recent information. Governors' regular visits to the school help them check on the information they receive from leaders.

External support

In reorganising the school's leadership, the local authority has taken a significant step towards securing the school's future. The school is also receiving help from the local authority in managing human resources. A multi-disciplinary group including school staff, a governor, the local authority school improvement adviser, the senior educational psychologist, staff from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and the headteacher of a local special school is providing valued support in devising a new, more appropriate curriculum. Support is also being provided, for instance for business management, by the pupil referral units.