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12 March 2015

Mrs L Moss  
The Principal  
Whitstone Head School  
Whitstone  
Holsworthy  
Devon  
EX22 6TJ

Dear Mrs Moss

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Whitstone Head School**

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2015.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal and representatives from the governing body. School documentation, including that for safeguarding and students' achievement, was reviewed. During short visits to classes, a sample of students' work folders was inspected and discussions were held with staff and students. The school's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

### **Context**

As a non-maintained special school, the members of the governing body also act as trustees of the Whitstone Head Educational Trust Limited.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

The principal and the governing body are determined to get the school out of special measures as soon as possible. They have taken the report from the section 5 inspection, conducted in December 2014, seriously and have acted promptly to remedy weaknesses that could be quickly and easily resolved. For example, lunchtime has been brought forward by an hour, so that students are less restless and agitated in the morning lessons and their overall behaviour and attitude to learning have improved. The principal has a clear vision and rationale for driving school improvement, which are shared by the governing body and known by staff. Nevertheless, the school is getting limited external support and the principal is working in isolation, with no other senior leaders and not enough evidence of potential capacity across enough of the middle leaders. Instability in staffing has been unsettling for students and staff. This all leaves the school in a very fragile state. Without more external support, the school will not improve as rapidly as it could and should.

The school's improvement plan sets out what needs to be done and how this will be accomplished. Whilst a number of the required actions have already been undertaken, mainly by the principal, and in some cases completed, it currently resembles a large 'to do' list, and mainly by the principal. More staff need to be held accountable against each action in the plan. The improvement plan needs to make clearer:

- the milestone targets for raising students' achievement and attendance, with specific and measurable success criteria
- how actions to improve the quality of teaching will be evaluated through the impact on students' achievement and their attitudes and behaviour (with links to performance management)
- the timescale over which all key improvement areas will be met, for example when all teaching will become at least consistently good
- that the person monitoring any actions taken should, wherever possible, be different to the person evaluating the impact of the action
- the arrangements for the governing body to evaluate and monitor the school's progress.

Governors are beginning to be less reliant solely on the information they are given by school leaders and are starting to undertake independent reviews of the school's performance and progress. School staff are having their work in the school evaluated by the principal through a robust appraisal system after Easter 2015. As yet, there is no designated person to conduct the appraisal of the principal on behalf of the governing body. The school struggled to find a suitable organisation to conduct an external review of the governance. This has now been organised to take place on 25 March 2015. The governing body has drafted a statement of action as part of its

trust responsibilities. Although it is recorded in the trust meeting minutes, it is not fit for purpose in its current format. It does not sufficiently outline how the school will be supported externally and how the quality of this support will be evaluated.

The school's information about each student and the ways in which records are being kept and maintained have improved. Assessments are now conducted each half term and are used to set targets for each student in each subject. It is intended that these will be externally verified. Named tutors have been allocated for each student, with weekly meetings and reports written to assess and record on how each student is doing. Students now have a personalised learning journal in which copies of their best pieces of work are kept. This verbal and written dialogue between the tutors and students is enabling the school to better identify the gaps in students' learning and understanding.

Risk assessments of activities in and out of school have been conducted and each student has a personal risk assessment. These are known and used by staff to spot antecedents to poor behaviour choices and to redirect students to more appropriate choices. The school documentation for behaviour, health and safety is fit for purpose but is currently under review by key staff. When completed it is intended that the documents will be externally reviewed. The school aims to have all documentation in line with the other new policy documents published in 2015. These documents are robust, pithy, easy to read and follow, containing all the information needed, such as further references and contact details, in one place.

The school now has a teacher with specific responsibility for improving student behaviour and raising school attendance. There are better systems now to check where absent students are, and to encourage those who do not want to come to school to attend. Tutors have helped by conducting home visits where appropriate and the school is informing parents, carers and education welfare officers from the missing student's local authority more quickly and efficiently. Recording students' absence is now more efficient, so that, along with other patterns of behaviour, missed lessons can be better tracked. Sometimes students who are residing in children's homes do not attend as frequently as they should. When this happens, they are not getting the education to which they are entitled.

The principal has conducted a work scrutiny and the results have been shared with staff. However, teachers are not learning from this or the best practice within the school, or seeing enough good teaching and learning in other similar schools, which they urgently need to do. Too much time is being spent on producing work sheets filled with activities that are not challenging enough to improve students' learning. There is not enough emphasis on developing students' English and mathematical skills throughout a range of subjects.

The quality of presentation seen in the students' folder varies from slapdash to careful and considered recording and storage. The best examples are in humanities where the work is thoughtfully marked and what the student needs to do next is clearly identified and followed up by the student and the teacher. The pages in the folders have holes carefully punched in them, so that the pages align with each other, providing a smartly produced record of the students' work of which they can be proud. Too often this quality of assessment and presentation is not seen in other subjects.

There are no showers in the school for boys to use after physical exercise. This does not encourage them to apply what they have learned in lessons about taking proper care of their bodies and adopting good standards of hygiene. In addition, this means that the school does not meet this part of The Education (Non-Maintained Special Schools)(England) Regulations 2011.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The school's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not 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, the Director of Children's Services for Cornwall and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**