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Mrs Helen McCormick
Acting headteacher
Haydon Bridge High School
Haydon Bridge
Hexham
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Dear Mrs McCormick

Special measures monitoring inspection of Haydon Bridge High School

Following my visit with Barbara Waugh, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 1 and 2 December 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2014. 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 not taking effective action 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 Director of Children's Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2014

- Safeguarding procedures across the whole school, including the sixth form, require immediate attention by urgently:
 - improving systems to record, maintain and retrieve information relating to all behaviour and safety incidents, complaints and concerns
 - securing staff knowledge about child protection and ways of reporting any concerns which may arise.

- Urgently improve the progress made by all learners and close the gaps in the progress between all groups within the school and nationally, particularly the most able, the disabled, those with special educational needs and the disadvantaged, by:
 - embedding a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy, and specifically writing, so that it is taught effectively across the curriculum
 - improving learners' attitudes to learning by ensuring consistently high expectations of the quality of their notes in books in all subjects and key stages
 - ensuring that those in need of additional support improve rapidly to keep up with their classmates, and those who are most able are challenged to achieve higher levels in all subjects
 - ensuring that all teachers and leaders use the data they have on learners' performance effectively to improve the planning for the support and challenge of learners in lessons.

- Continue to improve learners' attendance and, for those learners who are absent, instigate a procedure whereby, on their return, they are able and are prompted to catch up on work they have missed so that there are no gaps in their learning and notes.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - urgently reviewing and improving the school's procedures for maintaining records relating to behaviour and safety so that they are compliant and fit for purpose
 - securing rapidly the permanent leadership of the sixth form so that the necessary improvements can be made
 - monitoring the spending of the pupil premium funding so that the learners this fund is designed to support benefit from improved provision so that the gaps in their attainment, in comparison to that of their peers, close rapidly
 - ensuring that staff roles and responsibilities are clear and shared, especially for those responsible for child protection and for teaching assistants.

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

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, groups of pupils, the vice-chair of the interim executive board (IEB), and a group of staff. Inspectors also had discussions with subject leaders and senior staff, including the consultant headteacher. One inspector spoke with the Chair of the IEB and met with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.

Context

There have been a number of changes to staffing. Twelve teachers have left the school and five joined the school in September. A new leader for the sixth form was appointed from the existing staff. The school's plans to become an academy are moving ahead and the Regional Schools Commissioner has approved an Academy order for the school. The staffing structure has been re-organised and curriculum leaders for each subject, except English, have been appointed from the existing staff. A consultant headteacher supports the school for three days each week. The associated boarding provision, Ridley Hall, was inspected in June 2015 and judged to require improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Results at GCSE were mixed. Less than half the pupils in last year's Year 11 gained five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. This is the fourth year in which there has been a decline. It is of particular concern that results were well adrift of leaders' high and inaccurate predictions. Within this there were some notable improvements. The progress pupils made in English improved considerably and it is now in line with the national average. However, girls' progress in mathematics was disappointing. Disadvantaged pupils' progress continues to lag behind that of their peers, as does that of pupils with special educational needs.

Results in the sixth form were more positive than at Key Stage 4 and learners continue to make expected progress. However, the programme provided for those learners who enter the sixth form without a GCSE in English and mathematics was weak and the majority of learners did not make enough progress. Leaders did not tackle this with enough urgency last year. A new approach is now in place but it is too soon to evaluate if this is working.

There are some early signs that pupils' achievement is beginning to pick up, especially since September. Leaders have examined the quality of teachers' checks on progress and realised that some were based on single pieces of work and did not

fully reflect the day-to-day quality of pupils' work. Leaders and teachers have revised their assessments so that they are becoming more accurate.

Pupils' books show they are becoming more careful with their presentation. There are more opportunities for pupils to improve their writing skills and teachers have worked hard to make sure pupils develop the skills to write at length. This improvement is still at an early stage of development. Extra help for pupils who need support in improving their reading skills is also beginning to bear fruit, especially in Key Stage 3.

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved; they arrive to lessons on time and expect to work. Pupils are generally positive but a significant number give up too easily when they are asked a question or asked to tackle a piece of work they find hard. When this happens they rely too heavily on teachers or teaching assistants to provide the answer and show little resilience.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching overall has not improved quickly enough. This is due in no small part to a large turnover in staffing and a significant number of lessons taught by supply staff last term. This lack of continuity has hampered the rate at which teaching is improving. New staff have settled in quickly but it is too soon to evaluate the impact their teaching is having on pupils' achievement.

Teachers are beginning to make better use of assessment information to make sure pupils get the right level of challenge. There are some good examples where teachers ask well-judged questions that challenge pupils of all abilities to think through problems. However, this is not consistent and too often teachers fail to take into account what pupils of different abilities have already learned or can already do.

Nevertheless, teachers are optimistic and committed to improvement. They listen carefully to leaders' advice and value the frequent training sessions. Most teachers consistently apply the school's marking policy, assiduously picking out what pupils have done well and suggesting what they could do to improve their work. There are, however, occasionally some inconsistencies when teachers make sloppy mistakes, such as spelling errors when they are correcting pupils' work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Prior to March 2015 the school did not comply with statutory requirements in recording pupils' attendance. Pupils' attendance was not routinely recorded accurately in the afternoons. This was a serious safeguarding risk as the school did not know whether pupils were in school or not. Leaders acted swiftly once this unacceptable state of affairs became known. Current systems to record attendance

are accurate. However, as noted in the previous monitoring inspection, the true extent of pupils' absence was masked and the school's now accurate information demonstrates that the number of pupils who are persistently absent is worryingly high. Girls, pupils who are disadvantaged, disabled learners and those with special educational needs feature more often as poor attenders. Learners' attendance in the sixth form is also of concern. Current information suggests there has been some modest improvement in pupils' attendance but it remains a significant concern.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is generally calm and pupils say it is much improved. They approve of the new approach by staff and believe it is more effective and fair. This system is developing well and there are sensible plans to sharpen the way the school monitors the behaviour of different groups of pupils.

Behaviour around the school is sometimes less positive, particularly when corridors are busy. At these times a few pupils become impatient and push past others with little regard to good manners or indeed safety. Leaders, pupils and teachers all confirm that some pupils' casual use of foul language is a problem. Leaders have started to tackle this and as a result temporary exclusions have risen. However, that said, the majority of pupils are happy and friendly. Break and lunchtimes are calm and pupils enjoy spending time with their friends.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders, including the IEB, are candid in acknowledging that the results for Year 11 in the summer fell far short of their expectations. They know they have not secured improvement at a fast enough rate. This is due in part to some knotty staffing issues and a heavy reliance on temporary staff in the summer term. The other part of this conundrum is that too much work is falling on the shoulders of the headteacher, while the school prepares to become an academy. This has improved to some extent this term because important changes to the staffing structure have been put in place.

New curriculum leaders are taking responsibility to improve pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in their subject. This new team has got off to an encouraging start, regularly checking on the quality of pupils' work and supporting teachers to improve their practice. At present, there are occasions when they evaluate the quality of teaching too generously but they are a promising team and developing their skills quickly.

Further support is provided by the consultant headteacher who makes sure that the quality of teaching is closely monitored. Nevertheless, improvements have only started to gather pace this term and there remains a great deal of work to be done.

The school's procedures for safeguarding are secure. The vice-chair of the IEB has used her professional skills to support leaders in ensuring systems are appropriate and monitored carefully. Leaders sometimes lack confidence in presenting information but understand their responsibilities. All staff know to whom they should report any concerns.

A review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding has been completed. Leaders are responding promptly to advice, for example by making sure curriculum leaders focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders are also acting as mentors for disadvantaged pupils. These innovations are at an early stage and it is too soon to evaluate if they are effective.

Members of the IEB have been rigorous in monitoring the effectiveness of the school improvement plan. Minutes of IEB meetings demonstrate that they have offered sharp challenge as well as considerable support to the acting headteacher. They have not hesitated to use their specialist skills when needed. However, despite their best efforts, improvements have been slow in gathering momentum.

External support

The local authority shares the frustrations of the IEB at the modest rate of improvement. Nevertheless, actions are slowly beginning to bear fruit. For example the local authority brokered the support of the consultant headteacher. His work in improving the quality of teaching is starting to help teachers reflect on and improve their work. The school has particularly welcomed assistance from the local authority in dealing with staffing issues.

Support from Whitley Bay High School has had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour in lessons and provides valuable help for the acting headteacher.