

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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15 May 2017

Mrs Helen McCormick  
Haydon Bridge Community High School and Sports College  
Haydon Bridge  
Hexham  
Northumberland  
NE47 6LR

Dear Mrs McCormick

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Haydon Bridge Community High School and Sports College**

Following my visit with Belita Scott, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 23 March 2017, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt  
**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 23 March 2017**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, the consultant headteacher, the acting headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils and the chair of the interim executive board, and one inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors did not look at the quality or provision in the sixth form or the work of teaching assistants during this visit. Inspectors focused on the impact of leadership and management since the school was placed in special measures in December 2014.

### **Context**

The school's plans to become an academy have been delayed. Currently, the school is aiming to become an academy by September 2017.

The interim executive board (IEB) stepped down in February 2017 and the Secretary of State appointed a new IEB in February 2017. The executive principal, appointed by the school's sponsor, Bright Tribe, has been acting as a leadership consultant since September 2016. Another leadership consultant was also appointed in September 2016 by the school's sponsor and he has subsequently been appointed as the substantive headteacher. He is due to take up this post in April 2017. The previous interim executive principal left the school in July 2016.

A significant number of new appointments have been made, including a new special educational needs coordinator, head of science, head of English and a new pastoral leader who is also the school's designated safeguarding lead.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Since the previous full section 5 inspection in December 2014, the school has only recently begun to make progress and therefore is currently not on track for the removal of special measures. Unacceptable delays and disputes over the leadership and status of the school over the past two and a half years have resulted in pupils being badly let down. The results in the summer were very disappointing and the culmination of an extremely poor experience for Year 11 pupils.

That said, current leaders are making rapid improvements. These improvements, although at a very early stage, are injecting a much-needed sense of urgency and a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching. Leaders recognise that many of their actions have not had time to have a significant and substantial impact on improving outcomes for pupils. The school still has many weighty issues which have not been tackled at an early enough stage.

Despite dealing with a significant amount of uncertainty and media interest, the

acting headteacher has acted with dignity. Her impressive loyalty to the school has provided an important element of stability. Now that new appointments have clarified senior and middle leaders' responsibilities, leaders are becoming more exacting in making their expectations clear for teachers. The air of optimism reported at the last monitoring visit has gained a foothold and the school is at last beginning to improve.

New middle leaders have settled into the school quickly and they are starting to make a valuable contribution to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their areas. All middle leaders undertake regular focused reviews of pupils' work and observations of learning. They are using their findings more effectively to tackle pupils' achievement and weaknesses in teaching. However, there is inconsistency in the accuracy of their monitoring and their optimism is not consistently tempered with precision.

The new special educational needs coordinator has built on the good work started at the previous monitoring inspection. She has quickly gained the trust of staff and there are encouraging examples of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities making good progress.

The work begun in the summer to audit the quality of teaching and provide bespoke support to teachers is gathering speed. Leaders have taken a fresh look at their evaluations of teaching following the poor results in the summer. Their evaluations are generally accurate and based on a broad range of evidence such as book reviews and observations of learning. However, their assessments are occasionally overgenerous and do not consistently match the quality of work in pupils' books.

The new senior team has reviewed the school's improvement plan. The new plan is based on appropriate priorities and spells out the actions leaders intend to take, with a timescale for regular checks. However, arrangements for checking on how effective actions have been are not clear. This makes it difficult for leaders, including members of the IEB, to gauge success.

Effective approaches to safeguarding systems and procedures are now established. The school's checks on the suitability of new staff are robust and go beyond the statutory requirements. The school's work with external agencies for pupils in need of support are strong and record-keeping in this respect is now detailed and appropriate. The school is developing a promising system to record behaviour incidents. However, this has not been implemented effectively because staff do not consistently report incidents of bullying or the use of homophobic language.

The new IEB members have taken up their roles only very recently. Nevertheless, they have taken a swift decision to appoint an executive principal and a headteacher and inject a sense of stability into the school. The IEB also acted decisively to suspend boarding at the school's boarding wing to allow time to secure the necessary staffing.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching is continuing to improve. Teachers are routinely identifying the needs of different groups of pupils. Some teachers are skilled in making sure that they give pupils tasks that match their needs closely, and in these instances pupils make strong progress. For example, some teachers start with an activity to gauge pupils' understanding and then allocate tasks of different levels of difficulty to ensure that the most and least able pupils have the right amount of challenge. However, this practice is not consistent and some teachers rely on grouping pupils with similar needs together without ensuring that tasks are pitched at the right level.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are proving harder to shift. There are examples when pupils show a sense of enjoyment and are fully engaged in their learning, especially when teaching is of a high quality. However, typically, pupils are largely compliant and for the most part passive. The 'no hands up' rule is now more consistent and this is helping teachers to direct their questions and encourage more pupils to actively participate in discussions. The quality of teachers' questions varies but it is becoming more common for teachers to encourage pupils to offer reasons for their answers.

Teachers have adopted a consistent approach to involving pupils in assessing their own work and that of others. Pupils engage positively with this and take their responsibility seriously. However, pupils often, inadvertently, introduce errors when they are evaluating their peers' work and this is not consistently picked up by teachers.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Leaders have had a high degree of success in tackling pupils' attendance and reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent so that rates are now much closer to national averages. Closer work with external agencies, rewards for good attendance and detailed work with individuals have paid dividends. Leaders are aware that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities still feature more prominently than other groups.

Behaviour in class remains calm, although younger pupils report low-level disruption in some lessons. Pupils report that they often hear homophobic language used by other pupils. Younger pupils say that this type of language and other forms of unpleasant name-calling are commonplace. The school's recording of such incidents does not reflect the level of the problem. Pupils say that there are occasions when they report this type of behaviour that adults advise them to 'walk away' or 'ignore it'. Consequently, pupils do not consistently feel safe from bullying and incidents are under-reported. Older pupils have a more positive view.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

GCSE results for Year 11 were disappointing in 2016. Disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, boys and low-ability pupils fared particularly badly and made poor progress. Pupils' progress in both English

and mathematics also fell short of leaders' aspirations, revealing some worrying inaccuracy in some teachers' assessments. Leaders have been quick to tackle this, and a comprehensive programme of internal and external moderation has been undertaken. The school's current information shows a more positive picture and this is based more securely on the review of a wide range of sources.

Leaders are acutely aware of the need to rapidly improve pupils' writing. A recent system of focusing on technical aspects of writing across all subjects has the full support of middle leaders who are expected to ensure that teachers deliver this consistently. This work is at a very early stage and it is too soon to evaluate it fully. A few Year 7 pupils told inspectors that their handwriting had slipped back since joining the school, and work in some books supports this view.

### **External support**

The school's new IEB, supported by the school's sponsor, has been swift to make important decisions to stabilise the school. However, this is very recent and it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the work of the IEB. The sponsor has provided extra leadership capacity and this is beginning to bear fruit. Nevertheless, despite some effective work, the local authority, the sponsor and the outgoing IEB have failed to work effectively together to help the school establish strong and substantive leadership with sufficient urgency.