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18 June 2018

Mr Kevin Reynolds  
Executive Principal  
North Durham Academy  
High Street  
Stanley  
County Durham  
DH9 0TW

Dear Mr Reynolds

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of North Durham Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 6 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in May 2017. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2017.**

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in order to improve progress for all groups of pupils, by:
  - planning and delivering teaching that is well matched to pupils' needs and that ensures that gaps in learning are promptly addressed
  - having higher expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour based around the school's recently established assessment information and climate for learning policy
  - accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils and diminishing the differences between the progress of these pupils and other pupils nationally
  - improving opportunities for pupils to improve their English grammar, punctuation and spelling skills and to apply these across the curriculum
  - further developing the consistency of teaching in mathematics to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding
  - improving the deployment of curriculum support workers so that their impact upon pupils' learning is improved
  - improving the quality of questioning and feedback to address promptly pupils' misconceptions and gaps in learning
  - making more effective use of available assessment and planning information for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of leadership, by:
  - implementing middle leaders' planned actions to rapidly improve pupils' progress, particularly in English and mathematics, and regularly checking for impact
  - improving the planning, monitoring and evaluation of pupil premium spending and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that their progress improves
  - ensuring that support and induction are provided to newly appointed assistant directors to ensure that these leaders can make a prompt impact.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
  - improving pupils' understanding of what it means to be a successful, self-confident learner
  - increasing attendance levels and reducing persistent absence for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve students' progress on academic courses in the sixth form, to ensure that

it at least matches or exceeds national averages.

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

## **Evidence**

The inspector met with the executive principal, the director of school, other senior leaders and a group of middle leaders. The inspector met with two trustees, including the chair of the local governing body. Meetings were also held with a group of Year 8 and Year 9 pupils and, separately, a group of Year 12 students to discuss their experiences at school.

The inspector observed, jointly with senior leaders, a series of lessons in different subject areas and across different year groups. The inspector scrutinised documents, including the school's self-evaluation document, the improvement plan and middle leaders' action plans for their subject areas. The inspector also scrutinised leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including current school assessment information, work in pupils' books and information related to leaders' actions to drive up standards for disadvantaged pupils.

Furthermore, the inspector analysed the school's information relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

## **Context**

Since the previous monitoring visit, four staff have left the school. However, they have all been replaced. Staffing for September 2018 is showing signs of stability. Where supply staff are currently used, they are supported by leaders. New governors have been appointed. The local governing body is now at full capacity.

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

Since the previous monitoring visit, you, your director of school and other leaders have continued to work at an urgent pace to improve standards across the school. You are supported ably by your director of school, and you are both working strategically and effectively to address the areas for improvement outlined in the previous inspection. This is evident, as you and other leaders use the school improvement plan as a useful tool to monitor, measure and review the impact of actions taken to improve areas of the school, in particular the reliability of assessment information and the sharing of good practice in teaching.

Your and your executive leadership team's sharp, strategic planning and candid evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement are both strengths of leadership at North Durham Academy. As a result, leaders' work is paying dividends to secure improvement. For example, following the pupil premium review, you appointed a dedicated leader to focus his efforts on improving outcomes and experiences for this group of pupils. A plan is in place, alongside a series of strategies, in order to drive up standards for disadvantaged pupils. At present, there

are green shoots of such strategies having a rapid, positive impact. However, not enough time has passed to measure the overall impact on pupils' progress and experiences.

The effectiveness of middle leadership is clearly developing. For example, the heads of English, mathematics and science have a clear grasp of what needs to be done to improve the quality of the curriculum for pupils, so that it leads to improved engagement and outcomes. Subject action plans, for example, are used regularly by middle leaders to monitor, review and evaluate actions to date. They then decide what needs to happen so that they effect change more swiftly. Middle leaders are taking an active role in addressing weaker elements of teaching in their subject areas.

Governors' monitoring and evaluation of the school have strengthened. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the strengths of the school. However, they are also realistic about those areas that need the most attention. Governors' involvement in the improvement of the school is evident. They meet regularly, holding leaders to account, challenging them and supporting them well. They are knowledgeable about the school, and passionately dedicated to improving standards and supporting leaders.

Trustees are providing high levels of challenge and support. This is further enabling the local governing body and senior leaders to develop capacity. Governors and trustees are well aware of the need to ensure that improvements and leaders' efforts are sustainable so that the school can go from strength to strength.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Leaders and staff have increasingly high expectations of what pupils can achieve and are capable of. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils. The increased expectations are contributing to improvements in the school.
- Although leaders acknowledge that there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, they have worked effectively so that teaching continues to improve. Effective monitoring systems give leaders valuable information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. As a result, weaknesses are addressed swiftly.
- Professional development opportunities for staff are regular and valuable. They provide staff with the opportunity to share good practice and fine-tune their skills. For example, since the previous monitoring inspection, questioning has improved across the school. Teachers now use questions well to gauge pupils' understanding. However, there are still some instances where questioning is not used to further develop or extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils are benefiting from well-planned activities and learning that are sequenced so that they can show their understanding and demonstrate their skills in a given

topic or concept. For example, in Year 10 music, the well-planned activities effectively built pupils' understanding of how to manage and plan a live event. Pupils also benefited because these activities provided them with valuable opportunities to discuss and share their ideas – which they did with increasing confidence.

- Behaviour at the school continues to improve. Pupils are calm and considerate as they move around the school site. In classrooms, pupils are typically engaged in their learning and work well with their teachers and their peers. Pupils are increasingly wearing their uniform with pride.
- Attendance, overall and for groups of pupils, is showing steady signs of improvement. This is because of concerted efforts from a team of staff that works effectively together. Staff know the pupils and their families well and there are clear, systematic approaches to addressing absence early and swiftly. Leaders continue to appreciate the support they receive from parents and carers and the local community.
- Pupils are safe and say that they know how to stay safe at school and outside of school. Staff know pupils well. Pupils are growing in confidence and show maturity when sharing their ideas and opinions. For example, a group of Year 8 and Year 9 pupils spoke confidently and candidly when sharing the improvements in behaviour and how low-level disruption in classrooms is no longer a common thing. Pupils also said that, if they had an issue or concern in the school, staff would deal with it quickly and effectively to help them. The school has recently received an award for the work it does to challenge and prevent bullying.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain. Sometimes, teachers' planning does not meet pupils' needs. Work sometimes lacks challenge. Teachers ask questions that do not develop or extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Teaching does not consistently address the gaps in pupils' learning and any misconceptions they have. Previous weaker teaching means that this is essential if pupils' progress is to accelerate.

### **External support**

The school receives support from two different schools. This is to help improve the quality of science teaching, to share good practice and to help ensure the accuracy of assessments.