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Mr Bryan Stewart
Headteacher
Morpeth Chantry Middle School
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Dear Mr Stewart,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Morpeth Chantry Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in November 2017, the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and trust members are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior leaders and subject leaders to discuss the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I also met the chief executive officer of the trust and the director of the board of trustees. I undertook observations of learning with you and with your senior leader with responsibility for teaching and learning. I also met a group of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had identified since the last inspection. I held a telephone conversation with your school improvement partner to discuss her recent review of

the school's performance. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including progress information, updates on improvement actions and new teaching and learning documentation.

Context

A new headteacher took up post at the start of September 2018. The school has changed its senior leadership structure. The post of executive headteacher has been removed and the previous post-holder is now the chief executive officer of the Three Rivers Trust. The post of head of school has been removed and the previous post-holder is now the deputy headteacher. A new head of humanities is in place at key stage 3. New teachers have been appointed in English, science and in Year 5.

Main findings

Since your appointment in September, you have worked intensively to improve leadership and the quality of teaching and learning. You have reviewed the roles of senior leaders and worked with your senior team to establish a visible presence around the school site. You are raising expectations in many aspects of the school's work.

You have commissioned objective scrutiny from a new school improvement partner to assess, in more detail, the quality of teaching and learning. This has helped to sharpen your improvement strategies for identifying those areas of leadership and teaching that need to change most rapidly. Now that your diagnosis of the school's performance is complete, you realise that more pressing changes will need to be enacted to ensure that rapid and suitable improvement is implemented. A programme of more intensive support and challenge is scheduled to begin in December.

Senior leaders have worked with colleagues from across the trust to introduce a new model for teaching and learning. The teaching approaches advocated in this model address many of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Your colleagues have received training on how this model will be used to support the quality of teaching. You have also linked the implementation of effective teaching strategies to staff appraisal systems. This is intended to ensure that teachers are more accountable for the quality of teaching and learning. However, at this stage, there is still variability, both in how this model is being implemented by staff and how its effectiveness is being checked by leaders.

You have introduced structural changes to strengthen curriculum provision at key stage 3. Additional curriculum time at key stage 3 has been provided since September in history, geography, Spanish and French. New teachers, with secondary teaching experience in science and geography, are helping to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching in these subjects. There is evidence that ambitious planning and effective questioning are helping pupils to acquire deeper

knowledge and understanding in science and geography, although standards remain inconsistent across other subjects.

In discussion, pupils identified a stronger focus upon their learning since September, particularly at key stage 3. They believed that the learning environment around the school had, in many cases, become more disciplined and, as a result, more purposeful. Pupils could identify new opportunities to explore their learning and discuss their findings with their peers. They also said that heightened questioning and discussion work was complemented with formal opportunities to consolidate their learning by working independently and quietly in class.

You are taking action to strengthen the curriculum and improve transition between key stages 2 and 3. Your subject leaders have regular opportunities to work with colleagues from middle schools and high schools to explore how pupils can be prepared effectively for the next stages of their learning. In modern foreign languages, additional resources have been purchased to add greater depth to teachers' planning. In mathematics, leaders have joined local mathematics hubs to acquire a more confident understanding of concepts such as mastery. These approaches are providing the foundations for the sustainable improvements you are in the process of building.

You are also reviewing the role of progress leaders to ensure that support for pupils' social and emotional well-being is complemented by a stronger focus on their academic progress. You have introduced new forms of baseline testing to provide teachers with a more detailed picture of pupils' knowledge and abilities. This is intended to offer additional insight into pupils' progress over their four-year journey at the school. These initiatives are taking place alongside a review of feedback and assessment. These actions are helping to give teachers an accurate picture of pupils' abilities that they can use to set suitably demanding work. Joint meetings between subject and progress leaders are producing a more sustained focus upon attainment and progress. They reveal more clearly where improvement needs to be secured.

The trust is supporting the development of new approaches to teaching and learning. Additional training is helping staff to build increasing challenge into their work. In addition, new partnerships are making leaders, at all levels, aware of their role in raising expectations and continually checking standards. The trust has supported the commissioning of external review work. This is providing you with objective insights into leadership and teaching. Partnership work, with other schools, is supporting the development of the key stage 3 curriculum and your actions to improve the quality of assessment. While the trust is complementing your work to secure sustainable improvement for the long-term benefit of the school, it has not been as successful in securing short-term gains in areas such as assessment.

You are establishing a culture of higher expectations of leadership and teaching.

You have a clear and candid picture of areas for improvement and are introducing more rigorous processes to check the quality of teaching. You have put relevant plans in place. However, some of these would benefit from clearer milestones to help you secure appropriate improvements over time. In many ways, the rigour of your review of the school's work this term has revealed that some aspects of underperformance are more entrenched than was first apparent. You realise that these areas will need to be addressed with increasing purpose, particularly as the period prior to your appointment did not produce sufficient momentum for improvement. While the cultural change you are planning to bring cannot occur overnight, you recognise that the pace of improvement from school leaders and trust colleagues needs to accelerate in the months ahead.

External support

You have worked with a new school improvement partner to measure the school's current performance. This has helped you to prioritise areas for improvement and recalibrate improvement priorities. You are also working with external partners to build leadership capacity, with two colleagues undertaking formal and accredited senior leadership training. Work with neighbouring schools is helping to develop the curriculum and to check the accuracy of standards of assessment.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley

Her Majesty's Inspector