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27 February 2019

Mr C Todd  
Freebrough Academy  
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Cleveland  
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Dear Mr Todd

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Freebrough Academy**

Following my visit with Gordon Watts, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 January 2019, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2018. 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Barry Found  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018**

- Urgently improve safeguarding procedures in school by ensuring that:
  - leaders regularly monitor the attendance and whereabouts of pupils who attend alternative provision
  - attendance registers are accurately maintained
  - leaders act quickly to find suitable alternative courses for pupils if/when current arrangements cease.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching, learning and assessment, especially in English, mathematics, science and humanities by:
  - ensuring that the work pupils complete builds on their prior knowledge and understanding
  - urgently raising teachers' expectations so that all pupils are challenged appropriately
  - introducing systems to ensure that absent pupils catch up on their return to school
  - ensuring that teachers' assessment is rooted in firm evidence to accurately reflect the progress pupils make
  - reviewing schemes of work to ensure that pupils are given sufficient time to explore topics in detail
  - clarifying expectations of teachers and pupils in relation to the completion of pupils' homework.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management so that all pupils, including pupils who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities, make at least good progress from their starting points by ensuring that:
  - staffing instability is reduced considerably
  - leaders conduct routine checks on the accuracy of assessment
  - the actions of leaders, including governors and the multi-academy trust (the trust), do not negatively impact on the school's effectiveness for the benefit of the trust
  - leaders accurately evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - staff consistently apply school behaviour and assessment policies.
- Urgently improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  - ensuring that pupils attend school more often and persistent absenteeism decreases, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN

and/or disabilities

- reviewing the curriculum for all pupils who attend alternative provision so that courses meet their needs
- reducing staff inconsistencies in the application of the behaviour management policy
- raising teacher expectations in relation to acceptable standards of pupil behaviour
- significantly reducing the proportion of pupils who are internally and externally excluded for a fixed period
- addressing the increasing number of bullying incidents in the school
- ensuring that all pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and consistently show respect to others and the school site.

External reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23 to 24 January 2019**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers at different stages of their careers, and members of the rapid improvement board (RIB). In addition, the lead inspector met with the assistant director of education for Redcar and Cleveland local authority. Inspectors also met with pupils from each year group and talked with pupils during breaks and lunchtimes.

Inspectors visited a range of lessons, jointly with senior leaders and education consultants who currently work with the school. Leaders were observed giving feedback to teachers.

An inspector visited Redcar and Cleveland Training, Poulton Academy and Tees Valley College, three of six alternative provisions used by the school, and held discussions with managers.

During this second monitoring inspection, inspectors focused on the areas for improvement linked to leadership and management, pupils' behaviour and attendance, teaching and learning, and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

### **Context**

Since the first monitoring inspection, the school has experienced some instability in senior leadership as a result of resignations and long-term absences. To offset this reduction in leadership capacity, the principal has promoted staff from within the academy to senior leadership roles and enlisted the support of external consultants to bolster leadership. In addition, the chief executive officer of the trust is now based at the school for up to two days a week. The RIB has delegated powers to hold school leaders to account and is a point of reference for the trustees, who in turn hold the RIB to account for the performance of the school.

The school is staffed by a large number of temporary teachers as a result of ongoing staff absence and several vacant posts.

A school leader from within the trust continues to support the development of teaching and learning within the school. The school continues to receive support for two and a half days per week from a deputy principal from a local school, who has expertise in teaching and learning.

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

Notwithstanding leaders' determination to succeed and the raft of actions taken to kickstart the school's recovery, it is clear that there is little evidence of meaningful impact since the previous monitoring inspection. In some regards, the school has regressed. Leaders are not yet sufficiently effective in driving, and evidencing, school improvement.

The RIB dutifully checks that the school is implementing the various initiatives to improve the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and development and recognises that progress has been limited. However, there is less evidence of the RIB strategically holding leaders to account for shortcomings and helping leaders to find solutions. Similarly, the RIB is well-informed about the interventions taking place to reduce absence and improve behaviour but is less aware of the decline in these areas and consequently holds an overly rosy view of the progress being made. The RIB is not sufficiently effective in holding leaders to account by challenging the feedback it receives about the school's progress and using its expertise to strategically influence improvements.

The urgency observed among leaders during the first monitoring inspection is now less obvious. Leaders evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning in the school accurately. However, the pace at which improvement actions have been implemented is too slow to have a marked effect on pupils' learning and progress.

Leaders have worked hard to embed the 'PIVOTAL' approach to behaviour management, through their own actions, and the focused training and support they give to staff. Because of leaders' attempts to raise standards of acceptable behaviour, fixed-term and permanent exclusions of pupils have risen sharply to levels which are much higher than national averages. Despite this approach, since the last monitoring inspection the standards of behaviour in the school have declined significantly, both in lessons, and around the school during social times.

Leaders have not been successful in reducing the levels of absence of pupils or improving the attendance of those pupils who are regularly absent from the school. Both indicators have risen alarmingly when compared to school information for the same periods of time in the previous academic year. Punctuality to lessons was poor during the inspection, with significant numbers of pupils wandering aimlessly on corridors with some playing 'cat and mouse' with staff.

The school has provided appropriate pathways for a small number of pupils at risk of exclusion. At these alternative provisions, pupils' progress and attendance are monitored closely to ensure that their needs continue to be met. A skilled support staff leader has established effective relationships and clear lines of communication with the providers used by the school.

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

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are also inconsistent, which directly affects the progress pupils make. Pupils report that the quality of their learning experience relies almost entirely on how the behaviour of their peers is managed.

Across subjects, with few exceptions, inspectors saw a lack of challenge in the work set and low expectations in terms of the progress of pupils. Some teachers plan lesson activities accurately based on pupils' prior knowledge and skills to enable good progress, but this is only seen in 'pockets' of practice across the school. At the previous monitoring inspection, middle leaders reported that key stage 3 schemes of work were being developed to provide greater challenge and build upon pupils' prior learning. The effect of this work on the progress of pupils is only evident in a minority of cases.

There remains an inconsistent application of the school's policy on assessment, even though this has been a focus of leaders' work since the last monitoring inspection. A new assessment policy has been introduced which is designed to improve the accuracy of assessment. However, both its quality and application are underdeveloped.

Leaders accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, and learning. Using consultancy to build leadership capacity, they have ensured that improving the quality of teaching and learning remains a focus and a priority. Regardless of this, teaching and learning remain inconsistent across the school. The development and support required to make the necessary improvements are not always implemented with timeliness to ensure such improvements are rapid and sustained. The overall improvement in teaching and learning has been further hampered by the regularity of supply and cover teaching required to cover staff absence and vacant posts.

Pupils report that recently the number of supply and cover teachers has increased. They also report that when their usual teacher is absent, the work they are set often lacks continuity and challenge.

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

The attendance of pupils is a significant concern and has declined since the last monitoring inspection. It remains well below that of pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils who fail to attend school regularly has risen alarmingly when compared to a similar period in 2017/18. The attendance team has an appropriate focus on strategies to encourage pupils to attend regularly. However, alongside the effect of a significant rise in fixed-term exclusions on attendance, their work has had very little effect on reducing pupils' absence. During this inspection it was identified that the times registers close for morning and afternoon sessions are not

clearly defined. Hence, the school does not meet legal requirements in this respect.

The importance of good attendance is not high in profile around the school, and there are inconsistencies in the implementation of policy and practice. Pupils report that attendance certificates are presented to them in assemblies, but they are aware of few other examples where good attendance is recognised and celebrated. Leaders acknowledged these inconsistencies and areas for improvement during the last monitoring inspection, but the information presented to inspectors during this inspection showed that little improvement has been made.

The monitoring of attendance of those pupils who attend alternative provision is rigorous. The support staff leader has established effective means of daily and regular communication with a range of providers, which ensures that the whereabouts of all pupils are known. When pupils are absent, their absence is quickly and effectively followed up. As a result, those pupils who attend alternative provision improve their attendance.

The behaviour of pupils has declined significantly since the last monitoring inspection. Many pupils are slow to respond to the requests of staff and exhibit unacceptable behaviour, particularly during social periods, which at times is also unsafe. Pupils report that poor behaviour in classrooms limits their ability to learn and make progress. Inspectors observed at first-hand examples where pupils had poor attitudes towards their learning which were not challenged successfully, and, because of this, learning was disrupted.

Although staff supervise pupils' activity during social periods, this is not sufficient to change the behaviour of a significant minority of pupils who lack respect for their peers, staff and visitors.

The levels of internal exclusion are high because of the removal of pupils due to poor classroom behaviour. The levels of external exclusion are significantly higher than those of other schools nationally in similar contexts. Leaders are clear that these exclusions are the result of their strong response to pupils who persistently disrupt learning or who are verbally abusive or aggressive towards staff. However, this strategy has not made a discernible difference to improving pupils' behaviour.

The school has permanently excluded a disproportionately high number of pupils when compared to similar schools nationally. A consistent application of a graduated response to the challenging behaviour of pupils has not been implemented in order to 'nip in the bud' and pre-empt progressively deteriorating behaviour and avoid permanent exclusion where possible.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

RIB members and leaders are disappointed that indications from the most recent assessment point show that the majority of pupils are not making the progress they should be making. RIB members are less confident in explaining the reasons for the lack of improvement, although they acknowledge that pupils' attitudes to learning and classroom behaviour are significant influencing factors in this respect.

### **External support**

The support commissioned from within the trust has not had the effect on improvement priorities which leaders anticipated.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Urgently improve the behaviour of the significant minority of pupils who behave inappropriately and unsafely during lunchtimes and breaktimes.