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14 January 2011

Mr Michael O'Brien
Headteacher
Washington School
Spout Lane
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Dear Mr O'Brien

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Washington School

Following my visit with John Paddick and Robert Birtwell, additional inspectors, to your school on 12 and 13 January 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2010. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 Sunderland.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010.

- Improve the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress by:
 - eradicating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and ensuring that teachers always have high expectations of students
 - consistently using assessment and information about students' prior learning to plan work that meets the learning needs of all, particularly the most able
 - ensuring that lessons provide interesting, varied tasks that challenge all students
 - sharing the good practice clearly evident in school
 - ensuring that the behaviour management policy is consistently and fairly applied so boundaries and expectations of students and staff are clear.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - holding middle managers more fully to account for the effective use of assessment information in their areas of responsibility
 - increasing middle managers' role in monitoring the impact of teaching by observing lessons and by reviewing planning and its impact on students' progress
 - reducing staff absence to a minimum
 - developing additional strategies to increase students' attendance rates and to reduce the number of days lost to fixed-period exclusions.

Special measures: monitoring of Washington School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 January 2011.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 22 parts of lessons. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings held with members of the senior management team and the Chair of the Governing Body. Further discussions were held with a group of students and a senior officer from the local authority. Inspectors also spoke with a number of students during lessons and informally at breaks and lunchtimes.

Context

Since the previous inspection, long-term staff absence has remained a significant issue for the school. Some progress has been made in addressing this problem, with six of these staff leaving the school at the end of the autumn term. However, there still remains a number who are on long-term sick leave, which results in the school having to use an unacceptably higher than average number of permanent and short-term supply teachers to cover lessons. Seven teachers and five non-teaching staff joined the school in September. At the start of the spring term 2011, one new teacher and four non-teaching staff joined the school, with six new supply teachers also being employed. Two local authority nominated governors joined the governing body in September.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

At the time of the previous inspection, achievement and attainment were inadequate. A similar picture still exists, with the most recent unvalidated data from 2010 confirming these judgments. Progress in lessons seen remains too slow for students of all abilities. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities follows a similar pattern to that seen in the rest of the school, and is inadequate overall.

These low standards and slow progress are the result of two major factors. First, there are too many students with a poor attitude to learning; exemplified by poor listening skills and low levels of personal concentration to meet the challenges of learning in lessons. Second, there is too much teaching that is not sufficiently challenging to ensure that all students make progress in line with their known capabilities.

A significant number of students do not appear to enjoy school. This is exemplified by their general attitude in lessons and a lack of pride or interest in their written work, in particular with presentation, which is of very poor standard.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The behaviour of students has improved since the previous inspection, and is still satisfactory overall. There remains, however, a significant minority of students whose behaviour is extremely disruptive and which adversely affects whole-class attitudes, engagement and enjoyment of learning. Some teachers manage students' behaviour well, but too many lack a range of suitable strategies for dealing effectively with challenging outbursts in lessons. Furthermore, there is too much inconsistency among teachers with the way challenging behaviour is dealt with across the school. This often results in ineffective teaching that slows the pace of students' learning to an unacceptable level, and which wastes valuable lesson time in trying to manage the situation. This poor behaviour exemplifies itself most noticeably in very poor attitudes to learning, and a very disrespectful manner towards teachers and other students.

Some progress has been made in improving attendance and reducing the higher than average proportion of students classified as persistent absentees, with the autumn term attendance figure reaching 93%. Overall, however, acceptable levels of attendance are not being achieved by students in all year groups, with some that are still too low. For example, the attendance rate for the current Year 11 is below average. Punctuality to lessons remains a weakness and is negatively affecting the quality of teaching and the rate of some students' progress. Valuable teaching and learning time is lost dealing with those students who do not arrive promptly to lessons, and are too often insufficiently prepared to settle down to work quickly. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced since the previous inspection but still remains too high.

The effectiveness of provision

Progress in improving teaching and learning has been slow. During this visit, one in every five lessons seen was inadequate, two satisfactory, and two good. No outstanding teaching was seen. Overall, there remains too little teaching which is good enough to raise students' attainment and improve their rate of progress to acceptable levels.

Lesson planning has improved but, as in the previous inspection, too little use is made of students' prior learning to ensure that all abilities are suitably challenged in lessons; this applies, in particular, to higher attaining students and those with identified learning difficulties and/or weaker literacy skills. The overwhelming majority of lessons are too teacher led and directed, encouraging too passive a response from the students. In many of these lessons, the students show signs of disinterest by talking with peers as the teacher is talking, and making flippant comments to questions asked. In the worst examples, the behaviour of some students is extremely disrespectful to teachers and other students. Teachers' assessment of students' work shows considerable variety. While some is good, with

helpful comments, far too much is only rudimentary and does not give enough information about how to improve the quality or presentation of work.

The school has done much to raise teachers' awareness about improving teaching and learning, and expects that this will lead to improvement. Teachers are now focusing more on the learning process, and are more accountable for their actions. While some teachers have improved as a result of various coaching and mentoring programmes, others have not and there remains far too much variation across subjects and year groups.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement

- Improve the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress – inadequate

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, progress in overcoming its main weaknesses in leadership and management has been too slow. Leadership and management remain inadequate. Although leaders and managers have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved, and there is a good development plan, the pace of change is too slow. This particularly applies to improving teaching, raising standards and tackling the unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes of a significant minority of students. Nevertheless, there have been some successes, for example, in the introduction of systems to use assessment data, attendance and the number of sessions lost to exclusions has reduced. These are positive moves forward.

Governors have rightly challenged the school about the pace of improvement and particularly why the target of 60% of good lessons by December 2010 has been missed. They are also right to have concerns about the behaviour and attitudes of some students. Leaders and managers have had significant issues to overcome within the senior management team, which have not yet been fully resolved. Steps have now been taken recently to resolve this, but it is too early to judge whether these have been successful. There have also been weaknesses in the leadership and management of some subject areas, which have also reduced the ability of the school to move forward at pace. Further brakes on forward progress have been caused by staffing changes and the school's reliance on a large number of supply staff. The school faces challenging times ahead, particularly in relation to its budget in the next financial year.

The school's specialist technology status does not make a sufficient impact within the school, with current levels of student attainment and progress in the subject inadequate. Ongoing problems with specialist staff absence in this area are contributing, in part, to this lack of impact on improving outcomes and provision for all students.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management – inadequate

External support

There is effective ongoing external support for the school. The local authority's statement of action was detailed and well focused and has, as a result, helped the school to make some progress in important areas. A recent review carried out by local authority officers was extensive and detailed, and has given a timely reminder to senior managers and governors about the actions needed to make the necessary improvements. The local authority is also very aware that a number of significant challenges still remain, but its actions to date have been well focused and sufficiently challenging.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the overall quality of presentation of students' work.
- Develop and implement further strategies to tackle and improve students' attitudes and responses to teachers and peers in all lessons.