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14 January 2011

Mrs S Rossides
Headteacher
Darton High School
Churchfield Lane
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Rossides

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Darton High School

Following my visit with Ann Taylor additional inspector to your school on 12 and 13 Jan 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 - satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may 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 Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 20 and 21 January 2010.

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress by:
 - developing teachers' skills in the application of strategies to support learning
 - planning and delivering lessons which offer appropriate levels of challenge to all students
 - making better use of the effective practice that exists within the school
 - improving the quality and usefulness of marking and the standard of work in the students' books
 - managing more effectively the time allocated to additional subject support so that it has greater impact on students' achievement.

- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels has greater impact on the school's effectiveness by:
 - prioritising actions for school improvement and agreeing measurable success criteria
 - increasing the rigour of systems that monitor and evaluate the impact of actions on provision and outcomes
 - making expectations clear and accountability rigorous
 - nurturing the potential of senior and middle leaders through well-targeted professional development
 - increasing the rigour with which governors hold the school to account for its performance.

- Strengthen outcomes in other areas of provision by:
 - reversing the downward trend in attendance by carefully targeted intervention involving students and their parents
 - communicating clearly to students, staff and parents high expectations of behaviour, and applying these consistently.

Special measures: monitoring of Darton High School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 January 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 20 part-lessons. Documents were scrutinised and meetings held with the headteacher, the former executive headteacher, other nominated staff, students, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The new headteacher took up post at the start of the academic year and the interim executive headteacher continued to work closely with the school for the first half-term. His school, which is a National Support School, will continue to work with Darton High until it is removed from special measures. Two new heads of department, an inclusion coordinator and seven teachers, including two lead teachers, have been appointed since the last monitoring visit. The Interim Executive Board met for the first time in September. The school will move into its new building in February.

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

Results from examinations taken in summer 2010 improved on those achieved in 2009 and show that Year 11 students made better progress during their time at the school. There were some marked improvements, for example, the proportion of students achieving five high-grade GCSE passes rose by 12 percentage points but the results in English were disappointing and lower than expected by the school. However, there is evidence of considerable improvement already this year. Year 11 students sat GCSE English examinations in the autumn and just over 50% achieved a high-grade pass compared to 55% at the end of last year. The school forecast the results of the autumn examinations very accurately, reflecting more accurate assessment of coursework and rigorous monitoring of progress. Mathematics results from last term's GCSE examinations also show improvement and were exactly as the school forecast. Focused and well-planned interventions are in place to ensure that students improve their grades in the summer. Year 10 students are making measurably better progress than those in previous years. In Key Stage 3, internal tracking data show that students are making better progress as a result of improvements in teaching and the curriculum.

Progress in lessons was good in the large majority of lessons observed. Staff training and reminders displayed in classrooms emphasise the need to maintain a lively pace throughout lessons and have contributed to improvements in the rate of progress. Students say that they are working much harder than before and the quality and quantity of work in their books supports this.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress - good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance has improved considerably since September. Improving attendance has a high priority and is well promoted around school. Assemblies, competitions between tutor groups and certificates for good attendance regularly reinforce the message. The attendance figures for this academic year show a marked improvement with monthly figures of around 94% compared to an average attendance rate of 91.4% last year. Initiatives to tackle persistent absence are working well and the number of students who are persistently absent has continued to fall. Punctuality has improved considerably since our last visit to the school and lessons are getting off to a brisk start. Bells are no longer used to mark the changeover of lessons and students say this forces them to take responsibility for arriving on time.

Expectations regarding behaviour are widely displayed across the school and are used well. Assertive discipline has been introduced in Key Stage 3 and is beginning to have an impact. The standard of behaviour in lessons still tends to mirror the quality of teaching but there is increasing consistency as teaching improves. The number of 'call outs' from lessons has fallen since the last visit and the offences precipitating 'call outs' are less serious. There have been no exclusions since April. Students displaying the most challenging behaviour are now continuing their education in school so numbers in the seclusion unit have not fallen. Students and teachers say that behaviour is much better.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen outcomes in other areas of provision by:
 - reversing the downward trend in attendance by carefully targeted intervention involving students and their parents
 - communicating clearly to students, staff and parents high expectations of behaviour, and applying these consistently - good

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving well. The number of good lessons is increasing and there are fewer inadequate lessons. Much work has been done to ensure that all teachers are very clear about what constitutes a good lesson and there is an agreed list of seven non-negotiable features that must be seen in every lesson. Teachers are growing in confidence and leading training sessions rather than relying on outside help. Students talk confidently about a range of improvements in teaching and a small team of students are observing lessons and helping to identify good practice.

All teachers plan a good range of different activities and tasks to engage students' interest and resources are used well. Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved. Teaching assistants and teachers are working more effectively together to cater for specific learning needs. Work is underway to ensure that the most able students are stretched sufficiently but further development is needed. In the growing number of good lessons students' target levels are used to plan graded tasks that enable everyone to make progress. Regular recaps reinforce the main points and skilled questioning is used to check understanding. In the weaker lessons teachers are not consolidating learning effectively enough. They take answers from willing volunteers and move on quickly without making sure that everyone has understood the point.

The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and has already identified and begun supporting the weaker teachers seen on the visit. Extra support for individual teachers is having an impact and observation records show that their teaching is improving. The lesson-observation team has expanded to include middle leaders and systems for recording and analysing the quality of teaching are becoming increasingly sophisticated, enabling staff to hone in on key areas where more work is needed, both at individual and whole school level. There is a wide range of training and support available including coaching, mentoring and departmental training that is spreading good practice. The school has successfully addressed the need for more rigorous and regular checks on the quality of teaching by a wider team that was highlighted at the last visit.

A new assessment policy was introduced last term and early indications are that staff have responded well to its implementation, although there is more work to do to ensure consistency in self- and peer-assessment. The system for monitoring students' progress against targets has been refined further this academic year and the progress of different groups is analysed well. The time allocated to additional subject support is being managed more effectively so that it has a greater impact on students' achievement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has injected new life and purpose into the school. She provides dynamic leadership, has an accurate view of the school, and is not afraid to tackle under-performance. The very positive impact that she has made in a short time is acknowledged by both staff and students. She has continued to build on the work done by the former executive headteacher to strengthen senior and middle leadership.

Senior leaders are growing in confidence and working much closer together as a team with increasing awareness of each other's roles. They have sharpened their self-evaluation skills and are assessing the impact of initiatives and actions much more thoroughly. The team is stronger and more effective. Middle leaders have also developed considerably since the last visit. They know their areas well, have taken on increasing responsibility and are very clear about their roles. They share expertise and have begun to initiate improvements. Middle

leaders are invited, in turn, to meet with the Interim Executive Board to discuss their area and are conducting themselves very well.

Performance management has been tightened and under-performance is being tackled robustly. Staff absence, a concern at the last visit, is being addressed and has improved. The reliance on supply teachers has reduced and cover for absent teachers is more carefully managed to reduce any negative impact. The Interim Executive Board also monitors the use and impact of supply teachers to make sure that particular groups of students are not disadvantaged.

The Interim Executive Board is a small, tight group with a very good range of expertise. Attendance at meetings is very good. The Board has developed a very rigorous and robust system for monitoring the school's progress against the detailed action plan and all actions are systematically carried forward from one monthly meeting to the next. A thorough analysis of progress is carried out each term and leaders are expected to provide very sound evidence of impact. The Board is exacting and tough but members are very supportive of the school and its leaders. They have a very good grasp of the issues affecting the school and an accurate view of the progress that has been made.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels has greater impact on the school's effectiveness – good

External support

The school received very good support from the executive headteacher, particularly in the first half of the autumn term and he is still available for advice if needed. Managers and staff from his school have also given valued support. For example, they worked with the English team to make coursework assessment more robust and accurate. The local authority also continues to give very good support through the work of the School Improvement Partner and specialist subject support. The help given to the English and science teams has been especially good. Darton High is also establishing mutually supportive partnerships with other local schools as it builds its capacity and looks to the future.