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16 October 2011

Mr J Hallworth
Executive Headteacher
Washington School
Spout Lane
Washington
Tyne and Wear
NE37 2AA

Dear Mr Hallworth

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Washington School

Following my visit with Pankaj Gulab, additional inspector, to your school on the 18 and 19 October 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This was the third 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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

September 2011



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 third monitoring inspection from 18 and 19 October 2011

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, including 11 part lessons. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior management team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a senior officer from the local authority. Separate discussions were also held with a number of staff and a group of nominated students. Inspectors also spoke with significant numbers of students during lessons, at breaks and lunchtimes over the two days.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in May 2011, there has been a reduction in the number of staff, with three members of the former senior leadership team, one teacher and three support staff leaving the school. Also, one member of staff has gone on maternity leave and one support teacher is currently on long-term sick leave. Five teachers, one higher level teaching assistant and one administrative assistant started at the school at the beginning of September. There have been some internal promotions of staff and three of the external appointments have been at 'programme leader' level in science, humanities, and technology. A new site supervisor has been promoted from within the school. The number of students on roll at the school has reduced from 945 at the time of the previous inspection to the current number of 759.

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

The most recent 2011 GCSE results show that the school has made satisfactory progress in improving the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades, the proportion achieving a good grade in mathematics, and in the overall average points score achieved by the students. However, English continues to underperform against the school's own targets and national averages, which means that the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was 38%; the same figure as that achieved in 2010 and which is still significantly below the national average.

The overall progress of students in lessons is continuing to improve as teachers become more familiar with the whole-school assessment procedures and processes, and because of the better use being made of prior attainment information as a basis for setting individual learning targets and for planning lessons which meet the varying needs of the students. The continuing emphasis on literacy throughout the school is gradually helping to build a greater confidence in students to use these developing key skills across all curricular areas. There remains, however, a minority whose writing skills are underdeveloped relative to their age. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is matching the

general pattern of satisfactory progress across the school. Focused intervention work with these students is helping them achieve some degree of personal success in school. A significantly greater number of students than previously said to inspectors that they now enjoy their work more because of better quality teaching and improved behaviour throughout the school.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The behaviour of students continues to improve, with far fewer incidents that disrupt the learning of the students than seen on previous monitoring inspections to the school. Although it is too early to evaluate fully the impact of the recently introduced 'praises/consequences' behavioural initiative, the early outcomes are looking very positive. Both students and staff say that they are much clearer about the different types of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and what happens when this occurs. Overall attendance continues to be maintained at an acceptable level, with increasingly effective work being undertaken with those students deemed persistent absentees. The school maintains an accurate, single central register, which contains all the information necessary to ensure that all the required regulatory checks have been carried out on all adults who work in the school.

The effectiveness of provision

The overall quality of teaching continues to improve as a result of better monitoring of classroom practice by leaders and managers, and the school-based initiatives, which focus on the continuing improvement of core and advanced skills of teaching and students' learning. There is good quality consensus from staff about the need to improve the quality of teaching further, as an aid to raising levels of attainment for all groups of students. This includes, as a fundamental first step, the more effective use of information about students' attainment, and how this can be used to help set future learning targets that are more closely allied to the students' identified capabilities. The vast majority of teachers are skilfully translating this information into annotated seating plans, and in the best lessons are using it to plan activities and resources that meet the identified needs of all students. The most effective lessons are still characterised by teachers who have clear expectations of the students, and drive their engagement with energy and enthusiasm for the subject. All teachers prepare a range of suitable activities to engage the students in their learning, and are alert to any obstacles that arise, particularly instances of off-task behaviour. Occasionally, however, some teachers limit the students' learning only to the levels and targets identified and, as a result, can miss opportunities to extend the students' learning beyond the written expectations. Good use is being made of different activities that reinforce aspects of the students' developing literacy skills, particularly oracy, through whole-class, paired or group discussions, and which now includes some peer evaluation of work. Where learning is not as strong, teachers' expectations of the students' learning are not always sufficiently well matched to the full range of abilities in the class, which can affect the rate of progress that some students make. Opportunities for students to take charge of their learning are few and this leads to some being easily distracted and less

focused. The marking of students' work and oral feedback is continuing to improve and there is now a more consistent approach being used across the school. This is helping the vast majority of students to make better progress because they have a clearer view about teachers' expectations. Furthermore, they also know that they will receive helpful guidance to improve the quality of their work. When students have the opportunity to reflect and act on these comments, they most often achieve a higher standard of work.

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

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership and management are continuing to develop well, with an increasingly effective emphasis on ensuring that all staff and the governing body share a clear vision for continuing improvements. As a result of this collaborative approach to leading and managing the school, morale among the staff is significantly better than at the time of previous inspection visits. This is because staff feel valued and involved in decisions that affect the quality of their teaching and its impact on students' learning. Staff are also developing a more reflective professional role. This applies, in particular, to middle and senior leaders, all of whom now have clear roles and responsibilities which they apply well in their day-to-day work. Robust self-evaluation is making a significant contribution to the detailed planning that underpins the priorities identified and actions taken within the school. This is further embellished by the increasing use of student performance data, including analyses of progress across all subjects on a half termly basis. Other recent school-based initiatives focused on developing the evaluation and monitoring skills of middle leaders are also making an important contribution to the school's self-evaluation of its provision. This process includes thorough and accurate post-examination analyses of GCSE results at Key Stage 4, as a basis of reviewing where future actions need to be focused. The quality of this work has helped identify the reasons behind the students' underperformance in the 2011 English GCSE examinations, and the actions and support work needed to bring about the necessary future improvements. Middle leaders are also becoming increasingly adept at observing teaching and learning in their subject areas, which aligns well with the robust overview now being developed by senior leaders and managers. The school has tackled very successfully the previous trend of high staff absence, with current rates at a very low level. The school has successfully implemented different strategies to reduce persistent absenteeism and improve its overall rate of attendance. The most recent data for exclusions show a continuing trend in reducing the overall numbers.

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

- Improve leadership and management - good

External support

The quality of external support from the local authority remains highly effective. Ongoing local authority reviews of the school's provision are helping to keep a focused and well-targeted programme of interventions and challenges, which is making a significant contribution to the school's accuracy of its own self-evaluation of provision.