

CfBT Inspection Services  
Suite 22  
West Lancs Investment Centre  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 01695 566937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com



4 December 2012

Mrs D Morton  
Headteacher  
Alwick The Duke's Middle School  
Hope House Lane  
Alwick  
Northumberland  
NE66 1UN

Dear Mrs Morton

### **Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Alwick The Duke's Middle School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 December 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, separate meetings were held with the headteacher and two assistant headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and the school link governor, a representative from the local authority and a small group of parents. The inspector also held one joint meeting with the headteacher, the two governors and the local authority representative. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Governing body minutes, the school's 'monitoring teaching and learning' file and some school-initiated case study work on provision for pupils entitled to free school meals were scrutinised.

## **Context**

At the time of the previous inspection, the school had three temporary teachers covering a long-term absence and two staff on maternity leave. The teacher on long-term absence has now returned to the school and, from January 2013, the other two staff will return from their maternity leave. The governing body also has one new parent governor.

## **Main findings**

The headteacher and other senior staff have worked effectively with the local authority to produce a first-draft improvement plan that focuses well on the areas for improvement from the September inspection. The governing body has been less involved in the compilation of this plan, but is fully aware of its content and the implications for their role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. However, the governing body is also aware that its current organisational structure, with only one link governor for the school, limits the extent to which it can effectively oversee and monitor all aspects of the improvement plan. Changes are well advanced to appoint a larger group of linked governors to undertake a broader range of responsibilities within and across the school. This action is timely.

Those parents who met with Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) are positive about the school but would welcome updates in the school's newsletters of the school's progress towards becoming a good school.

The improvement plan is suitably broken down into separate actions against each aspect from the two improvement areas in the inspection report. However, although most of the content is appropriate, the language of some actions is too vague and too general to make it clearly understandable to all who read and use it to assess the progress of the school. A few actions, particularly, raising standards, are not yet ambitious enough to ensure that all pupils will make at least good progress in their learning.

Senior leaders, including the governing body and the local authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent inspection. However, following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- make better use of the most recent nationally published test data, and other school and local authority generated data to update some of the actions and targets for raising the standards of all pupils
- make the wording of some actions and success measures in the improvement plan much clearer in order to make it easier for senior managers, including governors, to accurately assess the progress that the school is making

- ensure that the half termly progress meetings are held at a time that is closer to the programmed governing body meetings to ensure that governors receive the most up-to-date progress reports possible
- provide at least termly summary information for parents on the progress that the school is making in becoming a good school.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The school makes effective use of partnership links with other schools. More regular links have also recently been established with the local authority as a result of the school 'buying its traded services' for school support. The regular half-termly steering group meetings between senior leaders and a local authority representative are giving a focus to regularly assessing the progress of the school. However, the current situation of only one link governor is a limiting factor in the governing body challenging and supporting the school because the range of expectations on this one governor is too great. The intention to create a governing body steering group that links directly to the school, acting on behalf of the fully federated governing body, will provide timely and more robust challenge in holding the school to account for its rate of progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland and as below.

Yours sincerely

B G Blake

### **Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority
- the academy chain where relevant
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead inspector.