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Mr Derek Cogle  
Headteacher  
Atkinson House School  
North Terrace  
Seghill  
Cramlington  
Northumberland  
NE23 7EB

Dear Mr Cogle

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Atkinson House School, Seghill, Northumberland**

Following my visit to your school on 18 June 2013, 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and with other senior leaders. In addition, the inspector met with the subject leaders for literacy and numeracy, and with the attendance support officer. The inspector also met with the school's improvement partner who has been commissioned by the local authority to support leadership and governance at the school. The inspector looked at a range of documentation including the school's post-Ofsted action plan.

**Context**

There have been no significant changes to staff or the school's organisation since the inspection. A local authority review of governance is scheduled to take place today. The school continues to operate over the two buildings that comprise the main site. As a result, students do not currently all have equal access to the curriculum opportunities provided by the school.

## **Main findings**

The headteacher has continued to build the support and trust of staff. He has quickly identified the most important barriers that are preventing the school from being good and has put in place appropriate strategies to address them. In particular, he has developed a revised curriculum for September 2013 to address the issue of the separate facilities on the school site and to ensure that the curriculum will be fully inclusive of all students. He has rightly identified the need to strengthen the way in which students' progress is tracked and how assessment information is used to set targets and identify underachievement. Together with the school's improvement partner and literacy leader, he has led the development of these new approaches in the use of assessment information. The headteacher has also overseen the development of new systems to improve the way in which information about students' attendance and behaviour is used, including in identifying those instances where students are on the school's site, but are sometimes not present in lessons. Nevertheless, there remains too little urgency in the pace with which these improvements are being implemented. Although links with a successful special school in a neighbouring authority have been established, this link is not yet providing strong enough support for school improvement.

Overall attendance at the school has continued to decline since the last inspection, despite the work of staff to reduce the persistent absence of those students with very poor attendance records. However, more could also be done to improve the attendance of those students who do attend for a majority of the time and to use an analysis of this information as an indicator of the overall quality of provision. The action plan does not indicate how attendance will be improved before September 2013, other than through the identification of a small number of students who can be removed from the school's roll.

The capacity of governance to support and challenge the school remains very weak and an external review of governance had not taken place at the time of the monitoring inspection. Currently, governors are not linked to individual strands of the school's action plan, including in relation to attendance, and governors' understanding of the school's performance has not improved since the section 5 inspection of the school.

The school's post-Ofsted action plan identifies a number of priorities linked to the findings of the recent inspection. However, the plan does not make clear the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and governors in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the actions stated in the plan. For example, action planning does not specify clearly how key staff will be held accountable for their roles in improving the school and does not indicate an appropriate range of success criteria against which to measure the impact of actions taken.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking enough effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- respond rapidly to the findings of the review of governance, including by improving the capacity of governors to challenge school leaders and by ensuring that individual governors are linked to strands of the post-Ofsted action plan
- strengthen the post-Ofsted action plan by identifying clearly the roles and responsibilities of key staff at the school and those aspects of the plan for which they are accountable
- implement, as a matter of urgency, the new systems to improve students' behaviour and their attendance to school and to lessons
- develop further the existing links with Furrowfield school in Gateshead.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. HMI will visit the school again at the end of the summer term in order to evaluate the extent to which senior leaders, governors and the local authority have addressed the issues identified at this visit.

### **External support**

The local authority has begun to address the weaknesses in governance identified at the most recent section 5 inspection and has established a steering group to support the school. An external review of governance is due to take place but there has not yet been enough progress in developing the capacity for stronger governance. The school improvement partner commissioned by the local authority has worked well with the school. She has worked in support of the headteacher, advised staff in the development of more focused assessment systems and has helped to develop a partnership with Furrowfield school in Gateshead.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**