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6 March 2014

Mrs Rachel Wilkinson
Associate Headteacher
Foremost School
Forest Moor
Menwith Hill Road
Darley
Harrogate
North Yorkshire
HG3 2RA

Dear Mrs Wilkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Foremost School

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you and the staff gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013. The 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve teaching across the school so that students make at least good progress and attain the standards of which they are capable, by:
 - making sure that what is taught, and the way it is taught, captures the imagination of students so that they want to join in with learning activities and behave well
 - making sure that all teachers in all lessons take responsibility for promoting literacy and communication skills by encouraging students to write more for themselves
 - making sure that teachers use accurate assessment information to help them set work for students that matches their ability and learning needs
 - taking steps to ensure that no teaching is inadequate and enabling good teachers to see what they need to do to become outstanding.

- Improve leadership, management and governance of the school and residence, by:
 - making sure that all safeguarding procedures are followed at all times
 - making sure that robust evidence is gathered regularly to help inform senior leaders and governors about standards in the residence and in classrooms
 - ensuring that senior staff and governors base their evaluations of the school's effectiveness on robust, accurate evidence so that they can pinpoint what needs to be done to make improvements
 - making sure that the school employs enough good quality, permanent teachers, prioritising where support is most urgently needed and working more closely with the local authority to find the most useful help
 - making sure that the curriculum includes enough opportunities for students to follow courses that lead to accreditation that matches their potential
 - Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

- Improve behaviour by:
 - making it very clear to students that, whatever their difficulties certain things are unacceptable in any circumstances and making sure that all staff are consistent in their application of sanctions
 - making sure that all staff identify times when students can take more responsibility for their behaviour and learning rather than allowing them to become dependent on adults to help them all the time
 - increasing levels of attendance and reducing the amount of time that the students who do attend are out of class.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 5 March 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the associate headteacher, the acting assistant headteacher, a duty coordinator, the executive headteacher, governors and a representative of the local authority. She talked informally with students: four were on-site at the time of the inspection.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection there have been a significant number of changes to staffing. Following the departure of the headteacher last term, the deputy headteacher and head of care were appointed associate headteachers to manage the school's day-to-day operation. An executive headteacher was appointed and is providing strategic direction and support to the school two half days each week. Very recently one associate headteacher left to take up another post. An acting assistant headteacher has been appointed from within the staff. At the end of last term one permanent and two seconded teachers left the school. Two permanent teachers who were absent long term due to ill health have returned to the school. A temporary appointment of a part-time teacher has been made. Formal consultations regarding the closure of the school in its present form are underway.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Developments since the previous monitoring inspection mean that there is now a much sharper focus on evaluating and raising students' achievement. A system for tracking students' progress in English and mathematics, against national expectations and in the light of their attainment when they joined the school, has been introduced. This is supported by a weekly review of learning in each subject. Where students are not on track to achieve their targets, staff ensure that they get the help they need to catch up. With the support of the local authority, students who need additional help to improve their literacy and numeracy skills have been identified and a programme of interventions is underway. A system for measuring the success of these has been put in place.

All the courses followed by students in Years 10 and 11 now lead to qualifications. All Year 11 students have already gained a qualification in functional mathematics at Entry Level 2 and four students have gained this at Entry Level 3. All are entered for GCSE mathematics and GCSE in English. Most Year 11 students are also entered for a GCSE in physical education and are completing a qualification in Preparation for Adult Life. All have post 16 places arranged and the school is focusing on preparing them for this move.

The quality of teaching

There has been an improvement in the climate for learning, in part because staff have higher expectations of students. In the lessons observed, good relationships between adults and students helped students maintain positive attitudes to learning even when their attention was flagging. Year 11 students showed real determination to complete their GCSE English coursework and are keen to do as well as they can in mathematics.

Positive features of the teaching observed included short, well targeted activities that matched the intended learning outcomes well. The common lesson planning format now in use is sharpening the focus on checking that learning is happening as the lesson moves on. Engaging resources, such as films and stories to which students could readily relate, current news events and songs, all helped to capture students' interest and make learning relevant. The topics covered, such as social exclusion, racism and justice, contributed well to students' social, moral and cultural development. Where learning was less successful, students were not challenged to think deeply enough or to give reasons for their answers in full sentences.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Leaders have raised expectations regarding students' behaviour. Further training for staff has helped increase the consistency with which restorative approaches are used right across the school. A system for recording and reviewing all behaviour incidents is now being implemented with reasonable consistency and thorough analysis of incidents is helping to identify where and when most issues arise. Changes to the timetable have been made on this basis and the impact will be monitored.

The very considerable reduction in major physical incidents noted at the last monitoring inspection has been maintained, so the focus has moved to addressing lower level aspects of anti-social behaviour. Whenever necessary, students are reminded that the use of bad language is unacceptable. There is now zero tolerance of smoking which in the short term has led to an increase in sanctions, including short fixed-term exclusions. However, although not in school, time is not lost to learning because staff work with students in their homes. Sanctions are balanced with rewards, such as the points system which affects students' participation in and choice of enrichment activities, and the new 'student of the day' award.

Attendance remains low, despite considerable efforts by the school and local authority to meet the needs of individual students and their families.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The roles and responsibilities of the executive headteacher and school leaders are clear. The associate headteachers have ensured that the school has run smoothly

day-to-day and that continues to be the case following further changes to staffing. The executive headteacher has been able to focus on strategic priorities, such as improving the quality of teaching and learning. Through monitoring lessons, priorities for teaching and learning have been identified both for the whole staff and for individuals. Support is in place for staff whose teaching is less than good and for those who have recently completed graduate teaching qualifications. Performance management has been put in place.

The many changes of staffing have been managed effectively so that the impact on the curriculum which can be offered is limited. Systematic planning for each curriculum area is now in place, linked to students' targets for this year, which helps staff keep on track.

The governing body checks regularly on the school's progress in delivering the actions planned and is aware that the improvement plan needs extending. Governors visit the school frequently to check on the areas they are responsible for and to see its day-to-day operation.

External support

The local authority arranged the oversight of the executive headteacher in addition to increasing support to the school from its own staff. As well as regular visits from the School Improvement Officer to check on progress, subject specialist support has been provided in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, personal, social and health education and behaviour management. Since the school does not have a coordinator for special educational needs, this area of work is also being supported by the local authority. Training has been provided in phonics and teaching literacy across the curriculum, some benefits of which were evident in lessons observed. Staff value the help provided.