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10 March 2014

Mr Russell Bridge
Associate Headteacher
Hope High School
Carfield
Skelmersdale
Lancashire
WN8 9DP

Dear Mr Bridge

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hope High School

Following my visit to your school on 7 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 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 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.

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 Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better throughout the school by:
 - teaching lessons that capture students’ interest and help them learn at a brisk pace throughout the lesson
 - raising teachers’ expectations of what students can achieve in lessons
 - making sure support staff contribute to learning in all lessons
 - providing more opportunities for students to improve their personal and social development in lessons and to work together.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - quickly establishing a vision and clear goals for school improvement
 - ensuring that systems to improve learning in classes are consistent, rigorously followed, adequately staffed and fully supported by leaders and managers
 - training staff to become expert at managing challenging behaviour and improving their level of knowledge and understanding of students’ learning difficulties and how to overcome them
 - building on better practice within and external to the school
 - developing training programmes to improve staff expertise in managing complex and challenging behavioural needs
 - implementing a rigorous programme to check and improve the quality of teaching.

- Review the content and organisation of the curriculum to ensure that the varied academic and personal learning needs of all students are better met.

- Improve attendance and reduce the rate of exclusions by developing an effective partnership between school and family that includes those families that are hardest to reach.

- Improve the governance of the school and the governing body’s ability to support and hold the school to account for its performance by:
 - securing full membership, including that of parent representatives
 - continuing to attract members who bring a range of relevant skills and expertise to governance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 7 March 2014.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a co-opted governor, teachers and two representatives from the local authority. I visited every class to observe lessons and met with two groups of pupils to discuss their views and experiences at the school.

Context

Since my visit in November 2013 the associate executive headteacher returned to his school when his contract finished at the end of December 2013. He continued to support the senior leadership team and the school until you took up the post of associate headteacher in March 2014. You have been contracted by the local authority until the end of August 2014. Arrangements for leadership in the school beyond that time remain unclear. Following the visit by the Department for Education, two academy sponsors have visited the school and met with the local authority and one is due to meet the governing body later this month. Your understanding is that the academy sponsor is keen to take over the responsibility for the school with a potential start date in the next academic year.

Two additional temporary teaching assistants joined the school in January and a business manager starts at the school later this month.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school assessment data are used by staff to monitor attainment and set targets based on national comparisons. According to reliable test results, pupils' reading ages are improving and some are making accelerated progress. Senior leaders believe this is due to pupils' improved attitudes towards learning, improved teaching and more regular targeted interventions. Although systems to monitor progress are being developed in the school, they tend to be too descriptive and lack measurable outcomes. As a result, they are not robust enough to provide sufficiently reliable evidence to inform future developments. The monitoring of progress in lessons is not happening consistently for a minority of teachers to track progress accurately and inform their planning. Progress meetings have begun to challenge teachers to provide evidence of improved teaching and learning, for example, through pupils' books, but this has lacked the rigour to ensure consistency. Teachers have reviewed the learning environment and some classrooms now show the levels at which pupils are currently working, but not how they reach the next stage. Staff regularly discuss the work and progress of the pupils, however, the evidence to support their views on progress tends to be anecdotal, rather than recorded.

The learning resource support is improving the basic skills of some pupils as detailed on their individual education plans; however, pupils are not being systematically encouraged to use these skills in other subjects.

The older pupils I met with said that most of the progress they had made at the school was to do with improved behaviour and attitudes towards learning and their future. However, the younger pupils talked about the progress they are making in subject knowledge and skills. For example, comments include: 'I've improved in reading, writing and art – I read every morning – I hated reading and writing before – now I've improved it's changed my attitude.' Further use could be made of pupils' self-assessment and views to help teachers chart pupil progress.

The quality of teaching

The improvement in the culture of the school has been maintained and pupils are ready to have discussions and be more reflective learners. They are ready to learn and have higher expectations of being taught well. Both groups of pupils said that the work is sometimes too easy and that all pupils in their class were expected to do mainly the same level of work. One pupil said that some pupils in the class may get more support, or do the work more slowly and this was evident in most of the lessons I observed during my visit. However, I saw an improvement in the quality of teaching since my last visit. For example, there was evidence of a higher level of challenge in some lessons, more practical work which involved risk and raised the participation of the pupils and a greater emphasis on improving and using subject-specific vocabulary. Safe practices are insisted on and followed by pupils in practical lessons.

Teachers are responding positively to regular feedback on areas for improving the quality of teaching. As a result of increased monitoring by senior leaders, lessons start promptly and more practical work takes place to engage pupils in lessons. Teaching assistants contribute well to learning in lessons and are no longer just managing behaviour. In lessons where pupils understand the relevance of the skills, knowledge and understanding they are developing, they remain engaged and on task, but they quickly become disengaged if the work is too easy or repetitive. A few teachers are not setting work at the right level for the individual pupil's level of ability to engage the pupil fully and promote progress. There is still an overreliance on worksheets in some subject areas which limits the responses from pupils. Marking of pupils' work is not always followed up by pupils or the teachers to support pupil progress.

The curriculum and structure of the school day continue to provide opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills as well as providing incentives to work harder in the morning in anticipation of the practical learning activities in the afternoon.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Senior leaders work closely with the families of poor attenders and there has been a significant improvement in attendance, which has risen to 89%. The improvement in pupils' behaviour and the calmer atmosphere around the school have been maintained. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced at Key Stage 3, but are still too high at Key Stage 4; however, the number of restrictive physical interventions has been significantly reduced. The majority of staff consistently enforce the school rules, however, a minority of staff are sometimes too reliant on senior leaders to intervene and manage disruptive behaviour with Key Stage 4 pupils.

Pupils I met and spoke to during my visit were polite and positive about their experiences at the school. One pupil said: 'All teachers support us with behaviour and the mentoring sessions really help us with our triggers and how to respond.'

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school leadership team, which has been in place since October 2013, has driven the developments and improvements within the school with consistency and determination throughout the changes to leadership oversight. The staff team remains positive about the changes introduced by the senior leaders who are visible in classes and corridors, supporting staff and pupils and leading by example.

The progress of the school action plan is monitored and regularly shared with the governing body through the school improvement committee. Staff are more skilled at managing challenging behaviour as a result of consistent expectations from the leadership team. Senior leaders are concentrating on improving the quality of teaching and learning now that the improvement in pupils' behaviour has been sustained and pupils are more ready and willing to learn. There are increased opportunities to develop pupils' social, emotional and behavioural skills and raise their aspirations. The curriculum is much more personalised to meet the needs of individual pupils within the school. One pupil I spoke to is looking forward to developing his communication skills by working in the school office; another said she enjoyed meeting people from other schools when she attended an off-site performing arts course. However, the impact of the more personalised curriculum on pupil progress is yet to be monitored to ensure that skills and knowledge gained in one part of the curriculum are transferred and sustained across all areas. An example includes: checking that the skills gained in the learning resource centre are reinforced by staff and embedded in pupils' learning in all the subjects being taught.

The governing body has full membership and has a clear focus on monitoring the developments in school through its school improvement committee. It is aware that the website needs updating to be fully compliant. Governance has improved, but there is a need for the governing body to receive clearer information about the results of the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress in the headteacher's termly report to governors.

External support

The local authority continues to support and monitor the school's progress and offers practical support to improve teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics, literacy and information and communication technology. A representative is also part of the school's improvement committee and produced a recent evaluation report for the governors. He has also undertaken joint monitoring of the quality of teaching in the school and is keen to continue this support to address pupil achievement.