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Mr Jon Whitcombe
Executive Headteacher
The North School
Essella Road
Ashford
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Dear Mr Whitcombe

Special measures monitoring inspection of The North School

Following my visit to your school on 25 March, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

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

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, your associate deputy headteachers, two middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority and a group of six parents and carers. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated. You accompanied me on a tour of the school enabling me to go into lessons and talk to students.

Context

Since the previous inspection, significant changes to the leadership of the school have taken place. In February, the local authority commissioned you, the Executive Principal of the Swale Academies Trust and a national leader in education (NLE), to assume responsibility for leading the school out of special measures. Three associate deputy headteachers have also been appointed on a full-time basis from within the trust. The governing body is in the process of being reformed; 13 members of the

governing body resigned at the beginning of March with four remaining in position. There are plans to appoint new governors but this has not yet happened.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have set about the task of improving the school with a sense of purpose and belief. Your actions have already led to improvements in both behaviour and in the classrooms. This is despite the short time you have been in post.

You rightly identified the priority to ensure that the school is a calm and safe environment for students to learn in. You have taken swift and firm action to bring this about. You have introduced a simple set of behaviour rules, with clear consequences, to tackle low-level disruption in lessons and improve punctuality. This initially resulted in a significant increase in fixed-term exclusions, but incidents of exclusion have already reduced, and punctuality and behaviour have improved. An example is that the number of students coming late to school on an average day reduced from 200 to 20. You have also moved quickly to establish non-negotiable expectations for teachers in all lessons. Teachers are now required to use the school's new lesson planning format and set differing levels of challenge for students in all lessons so as to cater for their differing abilities.

You and your senior team's actions have already brought about improvements that are clear to be seen around the school. Lessons visited were calm and purposeful. Students conducted themselves well around the school site and showed courtesy and politeness to staff and each other. Students said that they are now more able to get on with their work without disruption. Parents and carers agreed and said that their sons and daughters now feel safe in school and are much more able to learn without disruption. One parent commented, 'My son is coming home with a smile on his face.'

The local authority has planned regular visits to the school to check how well it is doing and to review the impact of the support it has brokered. However, the local authority's statement of action does not include any criteria or targets against which the school's progress can be evaluated. The progress local authority officers will expect to see when they visit the school or hold formal review meetings is not sufficiently well defined.

You have a clear vision for how you will address the areas for improvement required of the school. You and your team have already demonstrated the ability to take the swift decisive actions needed to bring these required improvements about. The school's written action plan does not have the same clarity. It is not sharp enough and actions are not clearly prioritised in a logical time sequence. The plan does not have clear milestones that define the progress you expect to have made at key

points in time. It also does not state the targets against which you will judge the effectiveness of the actions.

Following an initial period of inactivity an external review of the effectiveness of the governing body has now taken place. This review has confirmed the weaknesses in governance identified at the time of the last inspection. The four remaining members of the governing body are keen to see the school move forward. However, the governing body is not in a position to hold the school effectively to account. The plans to appoint additional governors from the Swale Academy Trust offer the potential to provide better support and challenge.

Following the monitoring inspection these judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers in each of the following subject areas: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, and design and technology.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector