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16 May 2014

Mrs Deborah Reeman
Acting Headteacher
Prudhoe Community High School
Moor Road
Prudhoe
Northumberland
NE42 5LJ

Dear Mrs Reeman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Prudhoe Community High School

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure, as a matter of urgency, that:
 - an external review of site security is carried out and school leaders respond rapidly and in full to its findings
 - the school follows its policy to ensure that all students and adults accessing computer systems have a unique and secure username and password so that internet access and use can be monitored
 - the attendance of all students, including those attending alternative provision, is recorded accurately and in a timely fashion.

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching so that it is always good or better, and thereby raise achievement, by ensuring that:
 - instances of inadequate and weak teaching and low-level disruption to learning are rapidly eradicated
 - all teachers have high expectations of students and use assessment information more effectively to plan and deliver lessons that closely match the needs and prior attainment of all students
 - there is a stronger and more consistent focus on encouraging students' enjoyment of reading
 - students are given clear, regular and helpful feedback on their work so they understand how to improve.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school, including the governing body, by:
 - setting clear timescales and deadlines for improvement, together with well-defined targets by which to measure success so that the pace of school improvement increases
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders focus on students' learning and progress when making judgements about the quality of teaching and that teachers receive development points that help them to improve
 - tackling inconsistencies in the quality of leadership and teaching through more rigorous performance management and stronger accountability of staff
 - ensuring that governors develop the skills required to challenge the school more rigorously by taking part in and responding to an external review of governance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14 to 15 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents. Inspectors met with the acting headteacher and other leaders, the whole staff, representative groups of staff, students, a small number of parents, members of the governing body, a National Leader for Education who is supporting the school and representatives of the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection the headteacher has left the school and a new acting headteacher has been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There have been no further external examinations results since the previous monitoring inspection. Evidence gathered during this inspection demonstrates that students with special educational needs are not making the progress that they should. The school's plans to support each of these students are not detailed enough and teaching and support staff do not receive enough guidance on how these plans should be implemented. The progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals has been slower than that of other students, however, data collected by the school suggest that the 'gap' is closing and results for this group are expected to be much improved when results are collated at the end of this academic year. The progress of students in the sixth form continues to improve.

The quality of teaching

While showing improvement, too much teaching still requires improvement. The lower attaining students in particular are given work which does not help them progress quickly enough. However, senior leaders are taking important steps to improve teaching, including the recent introduction of a more rigorous and focused approach to the monitoring of classroom practice. This involves regular joint observation of lessons by senior and middle leaders to check the standard of work in classrooms, the collection and analysis of data about students' progress and the sampling of students' folders and workbooks to ensure that marking is effective. Leaders are being effectively supported in this work by partner schools, including King Edward VI School at Morpeth and Cramlington Learning Village, which are helping them ensure that the judgements about teaching and pupils' progress are accurate. During the inspection, a number of joint observations took place involving inspectors and the school's senior and middle leaders. In all cases, judgements made by school staff were generally accurate.

The school's most recent monitoring records indicate that support for improving the quality of teaching is more focused and is related carefully to the needs of individual staff. This work rightly includes improving teachers' questioning skills and the use of assessment information when lessons are being planned. Evidence from lesson observations shows a positive impact on teachers' practice.

Students report that the recently introduced whole-school approach to the marking of their work is helping them see how they can improve. They welcome the fuller teacher comments that are evident in many of their work books. However, some teachers are still not following the guidance provided by senior leaders so that some marking is not helping students to improve their work. For example, in mathematics there is a preponderance of ticks and too little comment to guide students in how to correct errors in their work. Where marking is effective in, for example, English and history, it is specific and engages individual students in a dialogue about their work. It helps them see in detail what they need to do next to improve. In the sixth form, marking across all the subjects seen is now detailed and encourages students to achieve their best. Often teachers' comments are very focused, moving students' learning on by suggesting detailed next steps and particular areas for future research.

Too little has been done to increase students' interest in reading for enjoyment across the school. While there is interesting display work now in place, the school's plans in this area, although ambitious and promising, are still at an early stage of development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The improvements required to ensure safe access to the school buildings have been addressed. The local authority has worked with the school to ensure that the buildings are secure and appropriate locks and systems are now in place. Staff and students report that they are clear about the importance of security and understand how the new systems work. Leaders at the school carefully monitor the security of the buildings, including the Fuse onsite provision, on a very regular basis.

The school, working with the local authority, has ensured that all students and adults accessing computer systems have a unique and secure username and password so that internet access and its use can be monitored.

Attendance at the school is improving but those students known to be eligible for free school meals are still not attending as often as other students. The attendance of those students who receive their education in settings other than at the school is now being carefully monitored on a daily basis.

Students' behaviour is showing improvement, they take appropriate care and show consideration for others about the school and in classrooms. However, a small number of incidents of low-level disruption were seen during the inspection. These were the result of teachers' low expectations of students' capabilities. Students' attitudes towards their work are improving and this is becoming more evident across the school. Most are taking a pride in their work and displaying real engagement in lessons, especially in the sixth form.

Since the last monitoring inspection in January 2014 there has been a marked improvement in the appearance of the school. Despite the age and condition of some of the buildings, considerable effort has been made to make the learning environments more attractive. There is very little litter on the site and displays are generally in good order and reflect a wide range of the activities of the school. Students report that they have noticed and welcome the visible presence and active engagement of the headteacher and her team with them as they move about the school both in and out of the classrooms.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the appointment of the new acting headteacher to the school there has been a noticeable shift in the urgency with which weaknesses are being tackled. There is now a much clearer emphasis on improving teaching and heightened expectations about what students should achieve. Staff are more confident and increasingly welcome being held to account for the quality of their work. Subject staff and leaders report that the regular departmental reviews, supported by partner schools, give staff opportunities to improve their skills and share effective practice. There is a growing emphasis on staff working together in teams to improve provision for students.

Although there is evidence of progress across a range of activities, much further work is still needed. For example, the school is establishing a more coherent approach to improving the performance of students known to be eligible for free school meals, although this is still at a relatively early stage. Actions to improve middle leadership in the sixth form are not yet showing demonstrable impact because these initiatives are too recent.

Not enough progress is being made to improve the leadership of provision for those students with special educational needs. There is little evidence of information being shared and individual education plans for these students are not fit for purpose. The school has commissioned an audit of this area by an external consultant.

More needs to be done to ensure that governors have a clear view of how well the school is tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The link which individual governors have with particular subject departments and other aspects of the school's work is not being used well to hold senior leaders to account and is not being shared with other governors. A review of governance arrangements has taken place and governors have changed some of the ways in which they carry out their monitoring responsibilities. Training in the analysis of performance data is helping them to ask more searching questions, particularly about the school's use of the pupil premium funding (additional government money).

External support

The local authority has helped broker support which is proving to be increasingly helpful in tackling the weaknesses identified in the inspection report. Staff and leaders from the Cramlington Learning Village Teaching School Alliance and the Three Rivers Learning Trust through the King Edward VI School, Morpeth (both outstanding organisations) have been working productively in the school and have hosted training for the Prudhoe staff. These schools have helped validate the judgements on the quality of teaching and of students' work.