

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566863
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: jbennett@cftb.com

15 May 2014

Mrs Stephanie Hall
Acting Headteacher
Alnwick Lindisfarne Middle School
Lindisfarne Road
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 1AX

Dear Mrs Hall

Special measures monitoring inspection of Alnwick Lindisfarne Middle School

Following my visit with Rebecca Lawton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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 Federated Governing Body and the Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Joy Frost

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve all teaching to a consistently good or better standard, by:
 - creating a climate for learning, with high levels of interesting and well-targeted activities, that enthuses and motivates pupils to want to learn
 - ensuring that all teachers recognise when to move pupils on to more challenging and open-ended activities that test their thinking and promote their independence in learning
 - challenging pupils to link their learning in mathematics to everyday life
 - ensuring that all teachers make the best possible use of the directed improvement time (DIT) initiative, which allows the pupils to modify, refine, correct and improve upon previously completed work
 - ensuring that all withdrawal lessons for pupils who need extra help with key literacy and numeracy skills are challenging enough to help them make good or better progress
 - making sure pupils understand which aspects of their personal attributes and qualities are needed to help them achieve their learning targets.

- Increase the capacity of leaders and managers to drive school improvement, by:
 - formulating a more accurate self-assessment of the school's strengths and areas that need to improve
 - ensuring that the school development plan provides a clearer vision for school improvement and is shared more openly and regularly with parents
 - making sure that all information used to review school development plan priorities provides governors with regular, accurate and up-to-date progress measures
 - using up-to-date performance information so that prompt and decisive action is taken to improve the progress of all pupils and close the gaps in performance between different groups, especially those known to be eligible for free school meals
 - ensuring any assessment of the quality of teaching is linked specifically to improvements in pupils' attainment and progress
 - ensuring that parents have access through the school's website to all the information the school is required to make available.

- A review of governance is recommended with particular emphasis on the school's use of pupil premium funding.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior and middle leaders, two groups of pupils, a member of the steering group, the School Improvement Partner and a representative from the local authority. They observed lessons in English and mathematics in most sets in Years 5, 7 and 8 and teaching across most other subjects.

Context

The school continues to be part of the hard federation of Alnwick schools which has now reduced to three schools: this school, the Duchess' Community High School and the Duke's Middle School. The substantive headteacher remains on long term absence. The Chair of the steering group has left the area and a new Chair has been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's data show that Year 6 pupils are beginning to make improved progress in reading, writing and mathematics and pupils' achievement by the end of this academic year should be an improvement on last year's. New systems for checking how well pupils are doing are used to identify those who are underachieving and to plan targeted work for them. The school is carefully tracking the progress of different groups of pupils across the school and using this data to help close gaps in achievement, with a particular focus on pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils from service families.

There is still too much variation between the progress made by pupils in different sets in English and mathematics because systems used to assess pupils' progress and attainment are not consistently applied and are too complex. Teachers use a mix of continuous assessment, published schemes and formal testing. Pupils say that there are too many tests and that they do not always know what to do next to improve their work. The data that are collected are not used effectively enough by all teachers to plan the next piece of learning.

The scrutiny of pupils' books showed that, while progress is improving, pupils still have too few opportunities to write at length, independently and develop writing stamina. Mathematics books showed an overemphasis on the four rules of number and too little problem-solving work that tested pupils' reasoning skills or encouraged them to use their mental strategies instead of written calculations.

The quality of teaching

The climate for learning across most classrooms has improved. Classrooms are livelier and teachers are planning more exciting activities which engage pupils for the full lesson. The training that teachers have received from Cramlington Learning Village to help them to improve their practice and to standardise planning across the school was evident in the lessons observed. Lessons were showing common features and strategies for learning. However, the strategies adopted have not been sufficiently embedded or understood by all teachers and, consequently, they are not yet having an impact on pupils' progress in lessons. This is because teachers are trying too hard to incorporate too many strategies in one lesson. For teachers who require improvement, this planning has taken the focus off what pupils actually need to learn. For teachers who were already planning good or better learning the new planning sheet has not moved their practice forward.

Resources are used more effectively, especially in some mathematics lessons. Too few opportunities were seen which require pupils to problem solve and reason, especially in the middle ability sets and intervention groups. Teachers are much more aware of the gaps between different groups of pupils and all teachers have identified who these pupils are. There is a whole-school focus on improving the progress of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding (additional government money), with some success.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There were no areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection around behaviour or safety. Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. In all lessons observed, pupils behaved well and their attitudes to learning are improving as a consequence of more exciting teaching and learning. Pupils say that lessons are more interesting and that behaviour in lessons has improved.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has regenerated the teaching staff and re-engaged the parents. Staff morale is high and teachers are all working together with a common purpose to implement the action plan. The acting headteacher has already recognised that some actions are not having the desired impact on improving teaching as quickly as she would like and she has withdrawn from some planned activities.

New senior leaders and subject leaders have increased their involvement in checking and evaluating the work of the school. Subject leaders are more involved in data collection, in carrying out pupils' progress meetings with individual staff and in observing teaching and learning. The school's own monitoring records show that there is a need for a greater emphasis on developing the skills of subject and senior

leaders in this area. Too many lesson observations focus on what the teacher does and the link is not made between the teacher's actions and the impact on pupils' learning. Senior leaders are not focusing their observations on different groups of pupils in lessons nor identifying that there is a big difference between the progress pupils make in different sets and tackling this issue. Subject leaders are not carrying out sufficient moderation of teachers' assessments of progress across both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. They are aware that the accuracy of assessment is variable and, therefore, often unreliable and this needs to be tackled urgently.

The Hard Federation Governing Body Steering Group is very active in school and members regularly attend events in the school and hold parent surgeries. Communication between parents and the school has greatly improved. The acting headteacher sends regular newsletters and has reorganised the front entrance to make the school more inviting for parents. There is a very clear focus from the whole governing body, and especially the steering group, to hold senior leaders to account and governors offer the right amount of challenge to the school. The steering group members have requested data and information from the school to make sure they are fully up to date with improvements. They are aware that the action plan needs revising if the school is to make accelerated progress towards the removal of special measures.

Plans are in place to reorganise the teaching structures in the school and move to a more 'primary' model of teaching for Years 5 and 6 in September, where pupils are taught by fewer teachers. These plans are well underway and training and development for staff has already been timetabled. They are also seeking a programme of development for middle leaders to improve their skills in checking learning across the school. Much of the governing body's time has been engaged with plans for the future of the federation, in revising the whole structure of the governing body and a possible move to become a converter academy. The federation is in negotiations with the Department for Education and the local authority.

External support

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. The School Improvement Partner appointed by the local authority has worked closely with the acting headteacher to develop her skills and to support her in developing leadership capacity across the school. He has not visited the school as often as he would like and agrees that the support brokered from the partner school has not been effective in improving the practice of those teachers who require improvement quickly enough. The current action plan, aligned to the school's plan, needs to reflect the improvements made so far and prioritise actions to develop the skills of subject leaders.

Priorities for further improvement

- Simplify the current systems to assess pupils' progress in English and mathematics.
- Make sure teachers' assessments are more accurate, particularly at the start of Year 5.