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4 June 2014

Mrs Rachel Wilkinson
Head of School
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 3 June 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 fourth 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 judgements made during this monitoring inspection relate to the school's progress in addressing the issues identified at the time of the last section 5 inspection. The school's current lack of viability beyond the short term works against the sustained provision of an adequate standard of education for students.

The school may appoint as newly qualified instructors the graduate trainees who have been working at the school for a sustained period. A robust support package which includes access to the local authority's programme for newly qualified teachers, a named mentor from another secondary school, and individualised professional development opportunities, must be provided for each of them. The plans for providing support should be sent to me by the beginning of the autumn term 2014.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 3 June 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including two lessons seen jointly with the assistant headteacher, scrutinised documents and met with the head of school, the assistant headteacher, governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a student and a representative of the local authority. Three students were in school at the time of the inspection. Others were attending alternative providers or working with outreach staff.

Context

The executive headteacher, who was providing strategic support at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, has stepped down from this role. The associate headteacher is now head of school, responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school, while the local authority has overarching responsibility for strategic direction and decisions. Consultations on the closure of the school in its present form are currently on hold, because the process to seek an independent operator has foundered. A new way forward is being sought. In the meantime, the school has ceased to admit students, so it is currently operating with a very small number on roll, whilst retaining a full complement of staff. All parties concerned recognise that this is not viable. The residential provision is not currently in use: the numbers eligible to use this are so low that students themselves have expressed a preference not to stay because they feel isolated.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The establishment of a tracking system means that the school is now in a position to measure and evaluate the progress students are making in English and mathematics. The most recent assessments indicate that the majority of students in Years 7-10 are making at least the nationally expected rate of progress in mathematics and several are moving forward more rapidly than this. While progress in English is equally good for some students, the overall picture is more uneven, reflecting the variations in the quality of provision during this academic year. With the support of the local authority, leaders are beginning to extend tracking to encompass other subjects.

All Year 11 students have been entered for GCSE mathematics. Most have been entered for an IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) in English and several are expected to gain a good pass. Some students have gained accreditation ranging from Entry Levels 1 to 3 in science, religious education, preparation for working life and personal, social and health education. Some have gained BTEC qualifications, including construction and joinery, as a result of

following courses at alternative providers. This range and level of accreditation represents an improvement on previous years. Most, but not all, students have secured training or college places from September.

An intervention programme is under way aimed at raising the reading ages and literacy levels of a small number of students whose skills lag considerably behind those expected for their age. A local authority specialist has provided training for teaching assistants in the delivery of this programme. Although the full impact cannot be evaluated yet, interim measures show considerable gains in a short period.

The quality of teaching

Lesson observations conducted by local authority advisers and school leaders indicate that the quality of teaching and learning is improving. Training has been carefully targeted at weaker areas identified during visits to lessons. The benefits of this are evident in an increased focus on literacy skills in all lessons, although at times opportunities to develop students' use of language continue to be missed. The opportunity for staff to observe colleagues who have strengths in particular areas of practice has proved valuable for some teachers.

There has been a strong emphasis on using assessment information very carefully to plan learning for each student. Regular staff meetings reflect on each week's learning and plan next steps to meet the specific needs of individual students. Lesson planning seen during this inspection showed a careful consideration of students' interests in the selection of resources and activities. However, observations highlighted the challenge in creating a lively climate for learning when student numbers are so low and the social dynamics of those who are present are counterproductive.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Improvements in behaviour noted at the previous monitoring inspection have been built upon. Leaders are continuing to raise expectations of students' behaviour and, following their success in stopping students smoking on the school site, have also ensured that students do not have access to their mobile phones during school time. Higher expectations are also evident in a new tier of the reward system, which students helped to develop, introduced very recently. This is intended to encourage students to go beyond conduct which is usually expected in school, whether in lessons, off site or during social times.

Overall to date, attendance this academic year is a little higher than it was last year. The attendance of students, other than the four who are persistent non-attenders, is broadly average. Levels of attendance at work-experience placements are high. Leaders are taking advantage of high staffing levels to dedicate some time to

outreach work with non-attenders. This is having a positive impact for two students: in one case, attendance has risen from 40 per cent to 85 per cent. During this monitoring inspection, students were keen to make their views known. They say they do not enjoy coming to school when there are so few students present, because this limits their social contacts and activities.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Despite the protracted uncertainty about the school's future, with the support of the local authority, leaders are continuing to drive improvements. Termly action plans are focused appropriately and progress towards the targets set is reviewed regularly. Whole-school systems are in place to support improvements in the quality of teaching. These include a programme of quality assurance activities, weekly meetings to review students' learning and half-termly tracking of students' progress.

With the help of the local authority, a 'passport' for each student has been developed with the intention of promoting a holistic approach to meeting students' needs. The passports draw together the full range of information about students' needs, including educational performance and the involvement of agencies. Use by staff of these helpful digests is at an early stage.

Leaders are making good use of additional staff capacity to provide one-to-one outreach support to a number of students. This includes successfully helping some to re-engage with school, supporting continuity in learning for excluded students, assisting students who attend alternative provision, and working with students to develop their life skills as they move on to post-16 provision. Increasingly, staff are being held accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities and the consistent implementation of school policies.

The governing body provides a robust level of challenge to leaders. The school improvement committee is rigorous in its detailed tracking of progress against the action plan. Governors are clear about the information they need in order to check how well the school is performing.

External support

The local authority's support for the school is a significant factor in the improvements in provision noted above. Support is extensive and covers leadership, management, human resources, special educational needs, attendance and behaviour. Support for curriculum areas has also been provided, for instance in science, physical education and the humanities and more is planned to help develop literacy across the curriculum. Training has also been provided for teaching assistants, including improving their use of questioning. Local authority officers are working with the governing body in seeking to secure the long-term future of the school.