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8 October 2014

Mrs Helen Dunbavin
Acting Headteacher
Hope High School
Carfield
Skelmersdale
Lancashire
WN8 9DP

Dear Mrs Dunbavin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hope High School

Following my visit to your school on 7 October 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This visit 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 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 Director of Children's Services 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 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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 7 October 2014

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the school's parent liaison officer, the manager of off-site education and the teaching staff. I had telephone conversations with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. The acting headteacher and I visited all the classes being taught on site, talked with students and scrutinised their books. The single central register was checked and some minor errors regarding dates were amended. Other documents scrutinised included records on the quality of teaching, attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress data.

Context

Since my visit in March 2014, the associate headteacher has left and you have continued in your role as acting headteacher, supported by the acting deputy headteacher. One part-time teacher has retired and one teacher has changed roles and is now a teaching assistant. There are four full-time teachers and the deputy headteacher has a part-time teaching timetable. There are currently 30 pupils on roll, of which 28 are boys.

Achievement of pupils at the school

At the start of this term, the school introduced a more robust system to track and measure students' attainment and progress. Teachers gave examples to demonstrate their confidence that using this system improved their lesson planning and consequently the students' achievement. Regular tests to check on students' knowledge and understanding enable staff to target specific gaps and improve the quality of students' learning. Students use progress charts, in their books, to see when they have gained knowledge, skills and understanding in English, mathematics and science and this reinforces their achievement and highlights areas for development on a weekly basis. There are 'learning ladder' displays in every classroom so students can track their own progress. As a result, students show more interest in their learning and ask staff how they can reach the next level. Teachers recognise that they now need to ensure that students are provided with challenging academic targets across all their subjects, in the same way they are set targets to support improvement in their behaviour.

Although still well below average, examination results for the 2014 Year 11 cohort are markedly better than the results in the previous two years. Academic achievement is too low: not enough students are making expected or better levels of progress. The new tracking system enables teachers to spot where some of the more able students have not been sufficiently challenged by their work and, as a consequence, teachers are adapting their teaching strategies to rectify this. Those students who find it difficult to keep up receive individualised learning support, some of which takes place in class rather than outside lessons; this helps students learn and apply skills in the context of the subject being taught.

Students' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning continue to improve, especially Key Stage 3 students, as indicated in previous monitoring visits. The school is now in a position to really accelerate the pace of improvement in all these areas, especially in students' academic achievement. The focus on improving outcomes for students needs to be the school's top priority. The 'green shoots' of improvement seen so far need to flourish and become firmly embedded in order for them to have a lasting impact on improved outcomes for all students at Hope High School.

The quality of teaching

Teachers are clear about the benefits of the new systems for tracking students' progress. As a result, there is greater consistency in their planning and assessment. They have had training on how to plan teaching to meet students' individual needs. There was some evidence of this taking place during my visit to lessons; however, students were less involved and engaged in lessons when they found the work too difficult. Teaching assistants are not consistently used to support students' academic progress; in some cases, they are still too focused on reacting to low-level disruption from a few students. As the students' behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved over time, staff should expect more of them and challenge them to do and achieve more during lessons.

A structured programme to improve writing and numeracy, alongside the weekly basic skills tests, means that students have more opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills. This is clearly evident in that teachers are less reliant on worksheets and students' books show more examples of extended writing. Students' work is displayed and celebrated, and classrooms are supportive learning environments. For example, more information is available in every classroom to help students know what is expected and how to improve their work.

Marking has got better; it offers more detail to students on what they need to do to improve. However, there is too little evidence of students being encouraged to evaluate their own work critically. This needs to be addressed so that students can learn from their mistakes and move forward. The acting headteacher is monitoring the quality of teaching on a weekly basis and putting in appropriate support and training to enable teachers to improve and aim for consistently good teaching in all their lessons.

The school ensures that all off-site providers offer purposeful qualifications that add value to the students' experience at Hope High School. Off-site provision is monitored rigorously by the school. Not only has this improved relationships with a number of work-based learning providers, it has also increased opportunities for students to progress to the next stage of their education or training. For example, two students are likely to gain apprenticeships with one of these work-based providers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues to improve, especially in Key Stage 3. There are no visible signs of damage to the building and the school is well cared for and welcoming. Students I met during my visit were polite and happy to chat openly and sensibly about their school experiences. They were engaged in lessons and low-level disruptions were handled appropriately. As a result of improved behaviour and attitudes, the curriculum has been extended to offer more social interaction and enrichment activities, such as outdoor learning activities. Some Key Stage 4 students are taking a mentoring role with some of the Key Stage 3 students, and helping in lessons with coaching skills in Forest School activities and sports activities.

Further evidence of improved behaviour is demonstrated by the reduction in the use of physical intervention; for example, for a similar timescale last year, there was a reduction from 27 to six 'holds' undertaken. Similarly, there was a reduction in fixed-term exclusions during the summer term and there have been no fixed-term exclusions this term.

Attendance in Key Stage 3 is above the national average; attendance in Key Stage 4 is well below the national average. The parent liaison officer has altered her working hours to be more proactive in tackling poor attendance. For example, following a home visit, one student now has 100% attendance and another has improved from 20% to 80% attendance.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher targeted improving behaviour as their first priority and then moved on to improving the quality of teaching. They are aware that they need to address the extent of underachievement in the school and ensure that more students make better progress in order to improve outcomes overall. The acting headteacher actively seeks advice and guidance from other headteachers through formal and informal networks and the acting deputy headteacher is working towards the special educational needs coordinator's qualifications and linking with other schools in the locality.

The school has a calm and purposeful atmosphere and benefits from increased social occasions for students and staff. As a result, staff morale has improved, staff work as a team and there is less reliance on senior staff to intervene in behaviour management.

The curriculum better meets the needs of the students. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural elements of the curriculum have created more opportunities for students to discuss topics; as a result, students are able to demonstrate greater tolerance and respect for others. For example, world news events and topics such as child sexual exploitation are a regular feature on the timetable and there has been increased involvement of public bodies, for example the fire service, in the school. The improved links with external agencies, such as social services, colleges and careers advice have also enabled the school to share its improved reputation with a wider community. Although parents have chosen so far not to provide feedback to the school on Parent View, the school has encouraged more parental involvement through a recent open afternoon at the school and through home contact. The school has yet to analyse the views of parents as well as those of students and staff, and use these strategically to feed into the school improvement plan.

Although the school is improving, the rate of improvement is too slow. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plan are not sufficiently analytical of data, nor precise enough about short-term targets and outcomes. Apart from the challenges that being in special measures brings to a school, Hope High School has also faced many changes regarding leadership and management which have affected its pace of change. Governors continue to monitor and support the school. However, their challenge regarding the data they are presented with lacks rigour. Their evaluation of the impact the school has on improving outcomes for students is weak. The website has been substantially improved and includes links to the Department for Education and Ofsted, a detailed report about the impact of the pupil premium funding, details about the curriculum and admission arrangements, and a detailed account of its local offer for students with special educational needs to meet regulations.

An academy sponsor has been identified and the consultation process with staff and parents has been completed. The sponsor has been actively involved in monitoring the school, met with the governing body and local authority, and school uniforms and a new name have been chosen. The school was to have converted to academy status by 1 September 2014; however, the process has been delayed. This has delayed decisions being made about the substantive leadership and management of the school.

External support

The local authority provided support in the form of associate and executive headteachers to support the school at a strategic level and continues to provide school advisor and consultant support. The consultant and advisor worked with teachers to improve their skills in delivering mathematics, literacy and computing, and improving the learning environment for students. The local authority worked with the governing body on improvement planning and with school leaders on data analysis. As a result, the acting headteacher has become more effective in interpreting and evaluating performance data and is able to determine that too many students do not make the progress of which they are capable. Senior leaders are conscious of the need to prioritise improving achievement in order to raise standards overall.