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11 December 2014

Mrs Helen Johnson
Headteacher
West Cumbria Learning Centre
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Distington
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Cumbria
CA14 4PJ

Dear Mrs Johnson

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Cumbria Learning Centre

Following my visit with Janet Palmer Her Majesty's Inspector to your centre on 10 December 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 centre's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the centre became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 centre is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.
The centre 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 Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Build leadership capacity and develop a clear succession plan so that leadership is distributed across the centre and is not over-reliant on the headteacher or external support by:
 - taking swift action to ensure an effective leadership team is in place which is rigorously held to account by the management committee
 - developing middle leaders by ensuring all teachers and support staff have a progression plan for their professional development and that its impact is rigorously checked.
- Ensure leaders and managers fully evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the centre by effectively checking key areas such as:
 - the attendance of all groups of students
 - the longer-term success of those students who reintegrate back into mainstream school and those students who leave the centre at the end of Key Stage 4
 - the number and type of incidents relating to the behaviour of students while at the centre
 - the small, but significant, steps in progress made by students who attend the centre for either short periods of time or on a part-time basis.
- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 in order to accelerate students' progress and lift their attainment by:
 - ensuring planned changes to the curriculum are implemented fully and support students to gain appropriate qualifications
 - giving staff the opportunity to see outstanding practice in other schools and monitoring the impact of actions taken as a result on students' progress
 - ensuring that good practice already seen in some areas of the centre are shared effectively across the centre: for example, in teachers' marking, teachers' planning, the use of detailed small-steps assessment to identify students' progress and the use of classroom displays to support learning.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of management may be improved. The external review of governance should also include a specific focus on the impact of student premium spending.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the centre.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 10 December 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the centre's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Management Committee and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The deputy headteacher's post is now permanent; as a result there is a vacancy for a middle leader with responsibility for the core subjects. The middle leader with responsibility for practical subjects is currently absent; the mathematics teacher has left and a replacement teacher starts in January. Two supply teachers are teaching mathematics and practical subjects. Vacancies on the management committee have been filled by three new members. Since September, most students have been dual-registered, which is a significant change for the centre.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The centre liaises with local schools to gather sufficient information to address the social, emotional, behavioural and curriculum needs of individual students referred to the centre. Some of this information is not passed to the centre by the schools quickly enough; as a result, students' progress is hampered. Each student is on an individualised programme which may range from one session a week to address emotional development, to a full-time programme to deliver national curriculum subjects at GCSE level. The centre aims to reintegrate students back into mainstream schools and provide longer-term placements for students depending on their needs. The centre and referring schools do not consistently set out clear pathways for individual students to achieve their goals within the time they attend the centre. As a result achievement for individual students and groups of students is difficult for the centre, and referring schools, to evaluate effectively. The centre considers national figures when monitoring achievement to ensure high expectations across all areas for all students.

Reintegration rates have increased over the past three years; however, the long-term success of these placements has not been evaluated to inform future development within the centre.

The quality of teaching

Since September, staff from the centre have visited local primary and secondary schools to observe teaching in core subjects across the different key stages and to create links with specialist teachers. Other recent training has centred around improving emotional support for students and improving the process of recording education plans for individual students. The centre has started to address ways that

teachers can improve their subject knowledge and skills of delivery. Support for improvement to engage students has not included a wide enough range of subjects, so teachers are not fully confident in teaching citizenship and other subjects that have recently been introduced at GCSE level. The centre indicates that teaching in Key Stage 4 is not as strong as in Key Stage 2 and 3. The centre is aware of the need to undertake a more robust evaluation and provide appropriate support to ensure this variation in teaching quality does not adversely affect students' achievement.

The headteacher's records show that teaching is improving as a result of increased monitoring of lessons, scrutiny of students' work and higher expectations regarding teachers' performance. Records show there is some inconsistency in the use of students' target sheets to inform the planning of lessons and targeting support for students. Not all staff consistently apply the centre's expectations regarding the marking and correcting of students' work. Students' extended writing skills are not sufficiently developed, partly because there is some over-reliance on copying or using worksheets, which restricts their opportunities to write at length. Students have a high level of support in class and staff use the positive relationships they develop with the students to keep them on track in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff have continued to develop the students' social skills. The atmosphere is generally calm and positive at the centre during breaks and lunchtimes. No major concerns have been reported by parents, staff or students and two recent incidents of bullying have been addressed. The centre effectively monitors and tracks students' behaviour. Weekly meetings enable staff to target and evaluate quickly the impact of the support given to students to reduce instances of negative behaviour. The use of physical intervention and serious incidents have also reduced. Students spoke politely with inspectors and exhibited good manners during lunchtime.

Students in Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 have information about risk-taking behaviour delivered by external agencies. The centre has no detailed plan of what information each student receives nor any way of filling gaps in their knowledge, skills and level of understanding if a student misses one of these externally-provided sessions. The centre recognises the need to improve the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of young people and raise their awareness of life in modern Britain, but has not addressed this need holistically across the centre and beyond. Attendance remains too low and this has an adverse impact on students' progress and puts students at risk.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Recent gaps in the leadership team have reduced the capacity for rapid, sustained development in the centre. Systems and procedures are in place to monitor the

progress of the centre, but evaluation of the actions taken by the centre so far has stalled as staff rely too heavily on the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Senior leaders have not shared responsibilities widely enough across all staff to encourage staff to step forward and share accountability for the progress of students and the development of the centre. Members of the management committee are involved in monitoring activities within the centre to support senior leaders until the leadership team is at full strength.

The review of governance has been completed and the management committee has acted on the findings and recommendations of the report. As a result the management committee strengthened its membership and produced an action plan. Members have a sharper focus on improvement and ask for more evidence to support the centre's self-evaluation, including evidence to show the impact of the pupil premium funding (additional government money) on students' progress. The management committee has produced a calendar of meetings to scrutinise the work of the centre. It has not produced an evaluation cycle to ensure leaders and managers are held to account regarding outcomes for all students and that the statutory responsibilities of the management committee are met.

External support

The local authority meets with the headteacher every half-term and reviews the actions taken to improve the centre. Three representatives of the local authority are members of the management committee and offer support and challenge to the centre. The advisor assigned to the centre has a good understanding of the centre's developmental needs and challenges leaders to provide more robust evidence to support its self-evaluation judgements. A National Leader of Education from a pupil referral unit in Stockport completed the review of governance in September and reported her findings and recommendations to the management committee. The local authority plans to conduct an extensive review of the centre's progress towards meeting the local authority's targets, early next term.