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9 March 2015

Mrs Dawn Morton
Executive Headteacher
Alnwick Lindisfarne Middle School
Lindisfarne Road
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 1AX

Dear Mrs Morton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Alnwick Lindisfarne Middle School

Following my visit with Georgiana Sale, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 March 2015, 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 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 Federated Governing Body and the Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

David Brown
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 enthuse and motivate 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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the teaching staff, governors, representatives of the local authority and groups of pupils. Her Majesty's Inspector had a telephone discussion with the Director of Education and Skills for the local authority. Inspectors observed lessons in English, mathematics, science and a range of foundation subjects in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8. During these observations inspectors spoke informally with pupils and checked their work. A range of documentation, including the school development plan, safeguarding records and the minutes of governor steering group, was scrutinised.

Context

The school is one of three schools in the hard federation of Alnwick schools along with the Duke's Middle School and the Duchess' Community High School. The headteacher of the Duke's Middle School was appointed executive headteacher of both middle schools in January. A new head of mathematics took up post at the same time.

The school and the local authority are currently considering a number of models for the reorganisation of schools in the area.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Lesson observations and a detailed scrutiny of pupils' work confirm that attainment on entry to the school in Year 5 is broadly average. Achievement in both reading and writing was well above average by the end of Year 6 in 2014 and pupils continue to make good progress in reading in Years 7 and 8. However, opportunities to write independently and at length are more limited for older pupils. Also, at times progress in writing is restricted by teaching which focuses too much on the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar rather than encouraging pupils to make choices in their writing linked both to the purpose of the activity and the audience for their work.

Pupils' progress in mathematics is weaker but is beginning to improve. The new head of mathematics is ensuring that the assessment of pupils' work is more accurate and that lessons are planned more effectively to offer increased challenge to pupils of all abilities. There are early signs that this is having an impact on the quality of teaching and learning and that progress in mathematics is improving. The achievement of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils from service families improved in 2014 and school assessment data indicate that this improvement has accelerated this year. Regular use of accurate tracking data now allows underachieving pupils to be identified quickly and enables teachers to support these pupils with carefully targeted work.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching in all curriculum areas continues to improve. In the majority of lessons seen teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan activities that interest and engage all abilities. Teachers use questioning more effectively to check pupils' understanding and as the level of challenge in lessons increases pupils make more progress.

Marking shows an improvement across the school, although there remain some inconsistencies in the quality of written feedback given by some teachers. When used effectively the directed improvement time initiative, in which pupils are given time at the beginning of each lesson to correct and improve their work from the previous lesson, supports pupils' understanding and progress more effectively than previously. Discussions with pupils in all year groups confirm the value of this initiative.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There were no areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection around behaviour or safety.

Pupils are polite, respond positively to their teachers and engage fully with their learning. During the visit inspectors saw no examples of low-level disruption in lessons or at break times. Punctuality to school and to lessons is good and this reflects well on pupils' positive attitudes towards their learning.

The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Procedures and policies for safeguarding are fully in place and are reviewed regularly by senior leaders and governors. Pupils have a clear understanding of what makes an unsafe situation and, for example, are able to talk knowledgeably about e-safety and the potential dangers when using social media. Pupils are taught about different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying, and know what to do if they witness or experience it. Pupils report that there is some bullying and use of derogatory language from a small minority of their peers, but that when this occurs, staff deal with it effectively.

The federation has recently employed an attendance officer and this has led to attendance in the school improving to above the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The newly appointed executive headteacher knows the school well and has acted quickly to increase the pace of improvement in all areas. She has engaged and enthused middle leaders and the teaching staff to drive further improvements in the achievement of all groups of pupils. The roles of middle leaders in particular are

developing and they now understand the essential part they play in ensuring high quality teaching in their curriculum areas.

Procedures for checking on pupils' progress are strengthening. Pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is measured each half term and this information is regularly evaluated by middle and senior leaders. The system is becoming more secure as teachers' skills in assessing progress grow and, as a result, teachers know which pupils are on track and can give extra help to those pupils who are falling behind.

The governors' steering group holds senior leaders to account and governors both challenge and support the school well. They are up to date with appropriate training and use data well to assess the performance of the school.

External support

The local authority is in the process of reorganising its support for schools. The local authority adviser who supported the interim leadership of the school and a number of individual teachers has been replaced by a School Improvement Partner. The school is now developing its own internal capacity in order to support middle leaders and teachers when and as required.