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Ms Jo Venn
Acting Headteacher
Fearn Community Sports College
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Dear Ms Venn

Special measures monitoring inspection of Fearn Community Sports College

Following my visit with Jo Morgan, Her Majesty's 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2014. 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 Interim Executive Director for Children and Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2014

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics, so that it is at least consistently good across the college by:
 - making sure that teachers use the information they have on students' capability and progress to raise expectations, plan activities to meet their needs, fire their enthusiasm and give purpose to their learning
 - ensuring that teachers check students' understanding before they move on to the next activity, thereby making sure that the pace of teaching matches the pace of students' learning
 - develop teachers' questioning skills so that students are made to think hard about their learning, deepen their understanding and provide extended answers in order to develop their speaking and listening skills
 - making sure that all subjects, as appropriate, make an effective contribution to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills
 - bringing all marking in the college up to the standard of the best; making sure all teachers mark students' work regularly, that the feedback they give is effective in accelerating students' progress and provides a reliable indicator of students' achievement.
- Increase the proportion of students leaving the college with five or more high grade GCSEs including English and mathematics so that it meets, at least, the government's minimum expectation for attainment by:
 - making sure that all groups of students, including those eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority make good or better progress.
- Improve students' behaviour by:
 - reducing low-level disruption in lessons so that learning time for all students is maximised
 - reinforcing the need for all students to show respect and courtesy towards each other and their teachers
 - continuing to implement strategies to reduce the number of exclusions and improve attendance, particularly of students supported by the pupil premium at Key Stage 4.
- Urgently improve the impact of leadership and management in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching by:
 - making sure that senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the college is doing takes account of all aspects of the college's work in order to provide an accurate picture of performance and inform the priorities in the improvement plan

- using performance management rigorously to improve the quality of teaching and hold staff robustly to account for the standards achieved by students
- sharing the good practice of high performing middle leaders with their colleagues in order to drive up the quality of leadership and management across the college
- carrying out an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved
- undertaking a review of the college's use of the pupil premium in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, the associate headteacher who supports the school's leaders, groups of students, three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, four representatives of the parents' forum and a representative from the local authority. They spoke informally with students and observed their behaviour around school. Inspectors observed lessons in a range of subjects and reviewed students' exercise books and other examples of their work over time. In addition, they considered the school's monitoring records, scrutinised attendance and exclusion data, read the minutes of meetings of the governing body and the newsletters written by the acting headteacher. Examples of teachers' performance targets were considered. Inspectors attended a whole school assembly.

Context

An acting headteacher has led the school since 1 January 2015, following the resignation of the previous headteacher. Since the last monitoring inspection, five permanent teachers and two supply teachers have left the school. Four members of staff who are not teachers have left to take posts elsewhere. The head of English is taking maternity leave and two other teachers are currently absent. Four new teachers have joined the English department, two of whom are part time. Two temporary teachers are providing cover in technology and geography. A deputy headteacher from within the school has been appointed as acting headteacher for the summer term 2015. The recruitment process is underway to appoint a substantive headteacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's data indicate that standards are rising and that the proportion of students who are in line to attain GCSE qualifications in five or more subjects at grades A* to C will be better in 2015 than in the previous two years. Inspection evidence indicates that progress in mathematics is accelerating because teachers' understanding of students' capabilities and what they need to do next have been strengthened. Students are making good progress during intervention sessions as well as in their mathematics lessons. Mathematics teachers have reviewed the curriculum and are ensuring that they plug the gaps which they have found in students' knowledge. Teachers in some other subjects are supporting the development of students' numeracy skills, such as in science where Year 7 students were observed confidently setting about calculating the length of the human digestive tract.

Students' achievement in English is also being strengthened through intervention in Key Stage 4. There is still work to be done to secure good progress; some students have, for instance, taken far too long to read a set text for their examination and this has led to their learning becoming disjointed. Across subjects, evidence from lesson observations indicates that students are achieving more strongly in those classes where they are being challenged to achieve high standards and think for themselves. More teachers are now making better use of prior attainment data to plan learning that takes students forward. Literacy skills are a focus in many lessons and there is evidence in students' books that they are expected to use appropriate technical language in different subjects. Some teachers test students regularly on spellings which are specific to their subjects, such as in science. The school's arrangements for monitoring students' reading progress are underdeveloped. The modelling of good spoken English is not consistent among adults and this means that students continue to use colloquial English in situations where formality is needed. Although standards are rising in most subjects, leaders are clear that gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers in school and nationally remain too wide.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving but is still variable in quality. As one student put it, 'how well you do can depend on who teaches you'. Individual teachers have benefited from coaching and from visiting other schools to observe practice. The best teaching in school is lively and successfully promotes students' independent thinking whereas weaker practice does not sufficiently captivate students' interest; on such occasions their progress is weaker.

Students and parents who spoke with inspectors stated that good relationships are now the norm between teachers and students and they gave many examples of teachers 'going the extra mile' to support students. They agreed that homework is set more frequently now and is more meaningful. School leaders have checked the quality of teachers' marking, provided feedback and then rechecked to ensure that where necessary improvements have been made, in order that it is of good quality and is understood by students. In the best examples, such as in art and science, there is evidence that students have acted upon their teachers' feedback to improve their learning. Inspectors observed some positive examples of students discussing their thinking, such as when they explored endothermic and exothermic reactions in science, built upon each other's answers and challenged one another to explain themselves in more detail. In an English lesson, students made good progress in understanding the characteristics of political rhetoric when they were given time to explore persuasive techniques themselves before considering the quality of an answer prepared by their teacher. In other classes, teachers are over-reliant on asking general questions that elicit answers from volunteers only; this means that some students become less involved because they have the opportunity to opt out of actively contributing ideas.

The learning environment in school requires further development. In some classrooms, current students' work is displayed proudly and is of good quality. There are examples in art, science, history and personal and social education of relevant displays that promote learning. A prominent display of cross-curricular journals in response to students' work on the First World War demonstrates students' creativity and empathy. Around the school corridors, displays are of a more professional quality than was previously the case. In some classrooms, however, display is lacking or is not presented in a way that reflects on or celebrates students' learning well enough.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students and parents who spoke with inspectors consider that behaviour has improved under the leadership of the acting headteacher. They stated that uniform is now checked more rigorously and that the school has 'become stricter'. Most students behave well during lessons and treat their peers and teachers with respect; however, a small minority are disruptive and sometimes behave inappropriately on corridors when not directly supervised by adults. School leaders deal swiftly with any serious behavioural incidents and involve other agencies effectively when necessary. The rate of exclusion remains high although the number of students who have been excluded has fallen. Attendance is not high enough to ensure that students do as well as they can.

More positive attitudes to learning are apparent when teaching is planned to meet the needs of different groups of students, including the most able. Students are proud to represent their school, such as at an off-site technology event that took place during the inspection. More opportunities have been introduced for students to take leadership responsibilities, such as 'mathematics minions'. Opportunities for students to show their skills, such as by leading assemblies, are underdeveloped.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has had a substantial positive impact on the leadership of the school. She has improved communication systems and brought about a culture of higher expectations and has strengthened staff's commitment to make a difference to students' life chances. Students and staff held their heads higher at this inspection. Governance has been strengthened; governors are more knowledgeable about the work of the school. A detailed review of behaviour was undertaken by a specialist governor and his findings are being acted upon. Another governor has a specific responsibility for monitoring the spending and impact of pupil premium funding following the external review of this aspect of the school's work. The pupil premium is additional government money to support disadvantaged students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority. Governors and leaders are planning for the pupil premium to be more

specifically targeted to meet the needs of specific students, including by consulting with their parents on how the fund can best make a difference.

The leadership of learning has focused on sharing practice within and beyond school while ensuring that teachers' planning, teaching and assessment are of better quality. The school has had some success in this regard but recognises that there is still a way to go, particularly given the turbulence in staffing which has had an impact on some groups of students more than on others. Heads of department recognise that they are accountable for students' progress but they need more opportunities to hone their skills in observing, analysing and evaluating the work of their teams.

The school's appraisal system requires further improvement to ensure that teachers' targets are closely linked to the national Teachers' Standards and that they reflect the drive to secure high levels of students' progress. The acting headteacher has challenged teachers' performance targets so that they are aligned with the school's improvement priorities. Non-teaching staff are now part of the appraisal process, which has not been the practice recently in the school.

Parents are very appreciative of their new opportunities to become involved in the life of the school through the parents' forum. They commented on the responsiveness of the acting headteacher to feedback they provided and to the improvements in communication, such as the introduction of a weekly newsletter and contact cards detailing who they should speak to about their children's work or well-being. The acting headteacher has been proactive in developing relationships with primary schools and in providing opportunities for primary school pupils to gain a positive experience of Fearn through initiatives, such as the provision of master classes in mathematics for able pupils.

Parents and students are heartened that the acting headteacher will continue to work with the school when the deputy headteacher assumes the acting leadership role in the summer term. School leaders are determined that there must be no loss in momentum and that another step change is needed to take the school to its next stage of development.

External support

The acting headteacher, whose support was brokered by the local authority, has played a crucial role towards getting the school back on its feet. She is well supported by an associate headteacher who continues to work with subject leaders to develop their accountability. A teacher from a local school where there is acknowledged good practice continues to support the English department, principally through ensuring that their assessments of students' work are accurate. An adviser from the local authority's monitoring and intervention team continues to support the standards and effectiveness committee of the governing body. Three local authority

consultants are providing support for the school's recovery in English, mathematics and behaviour. The combination of support is making a positive difference in developing teachers' skills.

The school should take further action to:

- Review the assembly programme so that opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are maximised.