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David Baldwin
Executive Headteacher
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Alnwick Avenue
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Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mr Baldwin

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Norham High School

Following my visit to your school on 25 November 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in November 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for North Tyneside.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is at least good, by:
 - giving students high quality feedback on how to improve their work and ensuring they act on teachers' advice
 - giving students work which is challenging and is neither too easy nor too difficult for them
 - ensuring teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve
 - sharing best practice in teachers' questioning skills, so that all teachers question effectively in order to encourage students to develop their oral responses
 - equipping students with the skills needed to achieve success in tests and examinations.

- Raise attainment and accelerate students' progress, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - giving students more opportunities to use their numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring pupil premium funding is used effectively to raise the attainment of disadvantaged students in mathematics and narrowing the achievement gap between them, their classmates and non-disadvantaged students nationally
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality, quantity and standard of presentation of work in students' books
 - ensuring any gaps in students' knowledge are identified and filled quickly.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of middle leaders in monitoring the work of their areas of responsibility accurately
 - improving procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, by checking more carefully the quality of students' work over time.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 25 November 2015

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) met with the executive headteacher and members of his team, a group of Key Stage 3 and a group of Key Stage 4 pupils, a range of staff (including middle leaders), three governors (including the Chair of the Governing Body) and an officer from North Tyneside local authority. HMI visited a range of lessons and Year 11 registration groups (seven of which were joint visits with members of the school's leadership team) and scrutinised pupils' workbooks and folders. HMI also scrutinised documents, including the school's self-evaluation of its progress, the single central record and related safeguarding and bullying logs and documents and the school's records of the quality of teaching. A recent review of the school, undertaken by officers of North Tyneside local authority, was also scrutinised.

Context

Since the previous inspection in June 2015, the headteacher has left the school and the headteacher of Churchill Community College, a local outstanding school, has been appointed as executive headteacher. Two heads of school, also from Churchill Community College, have been appointed to run the school on a day-to-day basis.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

- The school is now taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation because the new senior leadership team have created and are sustaining a culture of high expectations for all. This culture is supported by straightforward and rigorous systems that carefully monitor the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.
- Governors are clearer about what needs to be done to improve the school. This is because senior leaders provide them with more accurate and focused information about pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching. Governors supplement this information with more direct contact with the school through, for example, closer links with individual subject areas and the newly created house system.
- The local authority continues to provide extensive support to the school. This support is having an increasingly positive impact because it is supplementing the carefully targeted work of the senior and, increasingly, middle leadership teams.
- Pupils report that they welcome the positive changes to the culture of the school that the new leadership has introduced. One pupil described them as 'massive'. They also welcome the recent introduction of a house system because they say it raises expectations and encourages competition. They are enthusiastic and pleased that more account is being taken of their views by leaders and governors.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders emphasise and focus on the importance of 'everyday excellence' and a set of 'non-negotiables' in all that the school does with and for its pupils. This is helping to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can and must do to reach their potential.
- The systems for the management of staff performance and professional training are effective and carefully linked by senior leaders to pupils' progress and attainment. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching because staff are increasingly clear about what they need to do to improve.
- The quality of teaching and assessment in mathematics continues to improve. Assessment procedures in Key Stage 4 are giving pupils clearer insights into their progress and what they need to do to succeed. Pupils report that they welcome this and the way it helps them see the strengths and 'gaps' in their learning.
- Senior leaders and, increasingly, governors are effectively supporting and challenging middle leaders in their work with their teams. There are regular meetings between individual senior and middle leaders where key areas for improvement and individual pupils' needs are identified. Agreed actions are followed up rigorously by senior leaders to ensure that teachers' work improves and pupils make the progress that they should.
- Leaders have put in place a programme of extra sessions for Year 11 pupils at the start of the day and after school. There has also been a week-long programme focused on mathematics during the half term holiday. These extra sessions are welcomed by pupils and their parents. They are well attended and are helping to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and confidence ahead of next year's GCSE examinations.
- Attendance continues to be a strength of the school. This is because clear and carefully focused support systems are in place that are rooted in high expectations and a 'no excuses' culture. These systems are successful because they individually address and overcome the barriers to attendance that some pupils and families experience.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There is still too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching between subjects and years across the school. This is because not all staff are consistently following the agreed whole-school approaches to, for example, marking and assessment. This variability is having an adverse impact on the progress of, in particular, the most- and least-able pupils.
- Although improving, not enough account is being taken by teachers in their planning, of pupils' prior skills and knowledge. In Year 7, for example, opportunities are missed to build on pupils' work and their achievements at primary school.

- In too many of the books seen, pupils' work is untidy and presentation is poor. Despite the whole-school agreed 'non-negotiables', this is going unchallenged by some staff. This is particularly the case with boys' work.
- The application of the whole-school approach to the teaching of spelling is inconsistent. Teachers do not always check that pupils have written out their spellings or that, when they do write them out, they are copied accurately.
- Although improving, pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length so that they can extend their literacy skills, develop stamina and explore ideas in greater depth. This is particularly the case for the most and least able.

External support

The school is receiving effective support from both the local authority and Churchill Community College, a local and outstanding school. This support is having a positive impact on the school's work. As well as brokering and monitoring the impact of the support of Churchill Community College, the local authority is providing focused support in English, mathematics and science. Churchill Community College is providing extensive support in developing leadership and checking the accuracy of teachers' judgements about the quality of pupils' work.