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30 December 2015

Mrs Sandra Graham
Haltwhistle Community Campus Upper School
Park Avenue
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Northumberland
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Dear Mrs Graham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Haltwhistle Community Campus Upper School

Following my visit to your academy on 8–9 December 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2015.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The academy's action plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Health Service for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2015

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so progress is at least good in all subjects for all pupils by ensuring that:
 - accurate assessment is used by teachers to plan and to teach lessons at the right level for different groups of pupils
 - teachers mark pupils' work more frequently and more accurately so pupils are aware of the next steps they need to take to improve
 - there is a stronger and more consistent focus on encouraging pupils' enjoyment of writing and mathematics.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - school development plans are based on a thorough and accurate evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
 - clear timescales and deadlines for improvement, together with well-defined targets by which to measure success, are set so that the pace of school improvement increases
 - inconsistencies in the quality of leadership and teaching are tackled through more rigorous performance management and stronger accountability of staff
 - middle leaders are fully involved in evaluating pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility, so that they are held accountable for tackling any identified weaknesses
 - the curriculum meets the needs and interests of all pupils so that all are well prepared for their future studies
 - funding provided through the pupil premium is used effectively in raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able
 - governors understand and use a range of evidence about the school's performance to enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account
 - parents have access through the school's website to all the information the school is required to make available.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8–9 December 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, leaders responsible for English and mathematics, two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a group of pupils and a group of staff. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a national leader of education (NLE) providing school-to-school support. The inspector visited nine classrooms to observe teaching; speak to pupils informally about their learning; and scrutinise the current level of work in pupils' books. Senior and middle leaders accompanied the inspector on all of these visits. The inspector also evaluated a wide range of documentation, including improvement planning and the academy's own analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress.

Context

An acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2015 after the resignation of the substantive headteacher who had been absent since the week of the May inspection. These appointments are temporary for one year. Two members of teaching staff have also left since the inspection. One appointment was made in September 2015 to cover both of these roles. The Chair of the Governing Body resigned during the autumn term and was replaced by another member of the governing body. Three other governors have also left; two of these vacancies have been filled. At the time of the monitoring inspection, three teachers were absent due to illness. These classes were being covered by supply staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes remain weak across the academy because leaders have not prioritised improvements to the quality of teaching. Unvalidated data for 2015 show that at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' achievement in mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling declined further on 2014 outcomes at both the expected and higher levels. In 2015, pupils were approximately two terms behind their peers nationally in mathematics and five terms behind in their grammar, punctuation and spelling. While reading and writing outcomes improved during the same period, figures remain below the national average. Progress from pupils' starting points is exceptionally poor; it is particularly slow for disadvantaged pupils and the more able.

Leaders' systems for analysing assessment information are confusing and burdensome. Two different approaches are being used between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Those being used in Year 7 and Year 8 are yielding inaccurate

information about pupils' progress because teachers have not adjusted their expectations of what pupils should achieve for their age in light of the 2014 National Curriculum. As a result, recent analysis presents too rosy a picture of how far pupils' progress has improved over the term. The acting senior leadership team acknowledges that the quality of teaching and the work in pupils' books observed during the inspection do not confirm the positive information being shared by the leaders responsible for English and mathematics.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between key stages, subjects and year groups are hampering a faster rate of progress. While there have been some quick wins, such as the implementation of a consistent approach to marking and feedback, this has only just scratched the surface of what needs to be done. The complacency of some staff about how far their practice has developed prevents the further improvement that is so urgently needed. This is compounded by the overly generous presentation of pupils' assessment information, especially at Key Stage 3.

The teaching of English and mathematics needs greater attention. Too many teachers present pupils with work that they have already mastered in previous year groups. While questioning is a feature of most lessons, teachers do not listen carefully to pupils' responses so that misconceptions go unchallenged. In part, this is because teachers are not secure in their own understanding of how pupils' learning develops from year to year; consequently, they do not plan tasks that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do. For example, instructional writing is taught in most year groups without any change in complexity for pupils of different ages and abilities. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve remain too low.

Small pockets of stronger teaching are evident within the academy, particularly in modern foreign languages and computing. However, the skills demonstrated by these members of staff are not shared across the whole academy to raise the quality of teaching more rapidly. Too few training opportunities have been planned to develop everyone's teaching skills to those of the best.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are polite, follow the academy rules diligently and recognise the need to work hard if they are to achieve their own ambitions. However, when work lacks challenge or fails to offer sufficient interest, pupils' concentration wanes and learning time is lost: time pupils cannot afford to waste if they are to realise their own potential.

Pupils believe that there is generally a calm and productive atmosphere around school but that this is not the case in all subjects. Pupils perceive that some teachers 'shout too much when you get the small things wrong', and say this lowers their confidence and makes them feel unsettled. Pupils are acutely aware that the higher number of supply teachers this term has prevented continuity in their learning.

Pupils appreciate the opportunity to work in teams and enter into friendly competition, such as through inter-house tournaments or school performances. They say that this 'brings the school together', which they rightly see as an important part of belonging to the academy and its community. Pupils are astute in recognising that there are differences in how well they learn across subjects, classes and year groups because, as they told the inspector, 'Not every teacher expects the same of them.'

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have not received the support or challenge they need from the trust to carry out their new roles effectively. As such, their energies have been misdirected: they have prioritised the updating of policies rather than the implementation of them in practice to ensure swift improvements to the quality of teaching. While both senior leaders are determined to make a difference for the benefit of pupils and the wider community, their actions have not had the desired impact on pupils' learning and progress.

The academy's action plan is not a useful tool for improvement. While it includes a number of relevant actions to bring about the necessary changes to practice, it lacks the detailed targets and milestones needed to drive a faster rate of progress. As a result, governors, in particular, are unable to hold leaders to account because they lack clarity about what success will look like, both in the quality of teaching and in pupils' outcomes. This risks delaying the academy's journey out of special measures.

Leaders' monitoring of teaching has become more frequent since the appointment of the acting headteacher, but it lacks focus. Too little attention is paid to the difference teaching makes to the progress of different pupil groups, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Not enough emphasis is placed on the typicality of teaching, as evidenced in pupils' books, when making a decision about the quality and effectiveness of teachers' work.

Senior leaders have delegated too much responsibility to middle leaders too quickly. While middle leaders have recently embarked on leadership training to boost their skills, this has focused more on the theory of leadership than applying their learning in practice. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have not

checked rigorously enough on the work of middle leaders to ensure that it is of the quality needed to help them introduce and embed key changes.

Governors openly acknowledge that they are not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to their proprietary duties. As such, they did not realise they would have to submit a statement of action or secure high-quality support for leaders and staff by themselves. A lack of swift action in these areas has hindered faster improvement. While the governing body has expertise in, for example, finance and human resources, none of its members have experience in education. Governors are therefore reliant on the information provided by the acting headteacher which, in terms of pupils' progress, is unclear and overly generous. The recent review of governance identified some important ways forward but governors are unsure of where to secure further training to address their own needs quickly. While governors who spoke to the inspector showed a passion and desire to make a difference, they are not yet performing their statutory functions sufficiently well to enable a more rapid rate of improvement.

The trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose. It does not set out the strategic actions that will be taken to secure a better quality of education for pupils in the community. It lacks detail about the arrangements the trust will employ for evaluating the work of the acting headteacher; the processes and timescales for recruiting a substantive headteacher; and how they will communicate with parents to ascertain their views and keep them informed of the academy's journey. Without this strategic direction, the academy is unlikely to emerge from special measures.

External support

The trust has been too slow in securing much-needed support for the acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and staff. Priorities for improvement have therefore focused on collating and reviewing paperwork rather than addressing the inadequate quality of teaching and pupils' exceptionally low outcomes. The external review of pupil premium funding, while completed promptly, has not shone a sufficient spotlight on what needs to be done to secure a better rate of progress for disadvantaged pupils.

More recently, the acting headteacher has sought support from an NLE of a local teaching school. Joint working has already secured a more robust process for holding staff to account for their performance in the classroom. Further partnership working has been agreed so that leaders and staff can share approaches to teaching and observe best practice. The acting headteacher is aware that close monitoring will be necessary to ensure that staff implement the learning gained from visiting other schools in their own classrooms.