

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



3 February 2016

Mr Gary Douglas
Interim Principal
Ashington High School Sports College
Green Lane
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 8DH

Dear Mr Douglas

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ashington High School Sports College

Following my visit with Stuart Cleary, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 January 2016, 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 January 2015. 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers if they can be coached and mentored by experienced tutors who are outstanding teachers with a track record of supporting new entrants into the profession successfully.

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 Director of Children's Services for Northumberland County Council.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so progress is at least good for all students, by:
 - ensuring the school sets realistic targets for students and that assessment is used by teachers to plan and teach lessons at the right level for different groups of students
 - ensuring teachers mark students' work more frequently and more accurately so students are aware of the next steps they need to take to improve.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that the senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the school is doing is accurate and realistic, and is used to target actions more effectively to bring about rapid improvement
 - implementing a rigorous system to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching throughout the school, using information about students' attainment and progress, and the quality of their class work and homework, in addition to observations of lessons
 - making better use of performance management to improve teachers' classroom practice and to hold teachers rigorously and robustly to account for students' achievement
 - ensuring leaders and managers at all levels frequently and rigorously analyse the progress that all groups of students are making, taking prompt action to tackle underachievement
 - checking that students who are supported by the government's pupil premium funding receive targeted support that accelerates their progress and narrows the difference in their attainment and that of other students in school and nationally
 - analysing more thoroughly all information gathered in the school, including attendance data, and using this to target actions to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence
 - ensuring governors understand and use a range of sources of evidence on the school's performance to enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account.

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 third monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 January 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal, members of the senior leadership team, a group of teachers and the Commissioner for Teaching and Learning from Northumberland County Council. They observed learning in 18 lessons, six of which were carried out jointly with the acting principal and vice-principal for teaching and learning. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils during lessons, at break and lunchtime. They also met formally with groups of pupils from all year groups with the exception of Year 11.

Context

There have been few changes in the school's organisation since the last monitoring inspection in September. One teacher and a learning support assistant have left the school. The school moved into the newly built and refurbished premises just before the Christmas holidays, December 2015. Work is ongoing to de-couple the school from the Ashington Learning Partnership of five schools, to become a stand-alone school. The local authority is working with the governing body to constitute a temporary governing body that will take over the reins until the school becomes an academy. The search for an academy sponsor is ongoing.

Outcomes for pupils

The 2015 Year 11 pupil outcomes reported in the last monitoring letter have been confirmed by published performance information. This identifies an improvement on the previous year's proportion of pupils gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics, but it is still well below average and the school's predictions. The variation in the achievements of pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium¹, disabled pupils or those with special educational needs and other pupils nationally was also confirmed. Current assessment information suggests that Year 11 outcomes should improve again this year. However, given the past inaccuracy in teachers' predictions, leaders are continuing to monitor learning and pupils' work to check if teachers' assessments and predictions are precise. Leaders are aware that current predictions for Year 10 in the 2017 GCSE examinations are too low and are redoubling their focus on this group to ensure outcomes improve. They recognise that the introduction of new national specifications and grading systems for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics, from summer 2017, is making forecasting the performance of this year group more of a challenge.

¹ government funding for disadvantaged pupils known to be entitled to free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority

A few Year 11 pupils report concerns about the number of temporary teachers they have had in English lessons. Others who have had a more consistent experience consider they are being well taught and prepared for their examinations. Leaders are currently working to stabilise the teaching staff for the group who have experienced turbulence in teaching.

Observations of learning in lessons, discussions with pupils, reviews of their work books and school assessment information on pupils' progress since September indicates that pupils are generally making at least steady progress in their learning. Teachers are becoming more adept in planning learning that meets the needs of the pupils in their class. Targeted training for teachers who are still not doing this effectively enough is helping to reduce the number of lessons where learning for the most able and least able is hindered because work is either too easy or too hard for them. Some gaps still remain in the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and other pupils in school and likewise, for pupils with special educational needs. Actions are being put in place to tackle this deficit.

New assessment systems developed in the autumn term to track regularly the progress of Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils are beginning to be embedded in teachers' practice. Pupils are starting to understand what the assessment system means and how well they are doing. However, the process is too early in its development to see whether it will have the desired impact of enabling teachers to: plan learning that moves pupils on quickly from what they already know and understand, identify gaps that need to be tackled quickly and evidence progress over time.

Pupils' skills in, and enjoyment of, reading are growing because of the specific lessons they now have in the new library to read and review books regularly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders continue to focus on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and its impact on learning across the school. They have a clearer view of what good teaching looks like through support from the outstanding schools they are working with and by recognising and sharing the good practice that already exists in school. Systems to check the quality of teaching and learning are more robust. Teachers report that they recognise the much higher expectations of their work and impact. They consider that training and leaders' monitoring of their lessons and their pupils' work is really sharpening and improving their practice in providing useful feedback to pupils about their work.

The majority of pupils who spoke to inspectors report that teaching has continued to improve since September. They say teachers' marking and feedback is becoming more consistent. When done well, pupils value the time teachers spend in offering that feedback because it helps them to better-understand how they are doing. More teachers are complying with the school's marking and feedback policy but there are

still occasions where this is not the case. Leaders are well aware of this and are providing more targeted support. For example, individual training, coaching and support plans are in place to support improvement in teachers' practice where weaknesses are identified as a result of the leaders' checks on learning in lessons, work in pupils' books or on the effectiveness of marking and feedback.

Pupils' books are generally well-presented and show little time is wasted. They undertake regular assessments and these are carefully checked to identify pupils' successes, misunderstandings and what they may need to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils conduct themselves around the school and school grounds appropriately. They come to lessons briskly and settle down quickly to their work in class. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally cordial and when pupils work in groups or pairs, they usually work cooperatively and productively.

Strenuous efforts by pastoral staff, leaders and the education welfare officer are continuing to make small inroads into improving the attendance rates of pupils. Rates are still below average but increasing over time. Leaders know there is still more to do to reduce the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent because their absence rates remain stubbornly below that of other pupils.

Leaders speak honestly about how the 'honeymoon period' of good behaviour seen at the start of the new school year, following the influx of the three new year groups and implementation of the new behaviour policy, lapsed somewhat by the middle of last term. They found the behaviour and attitudes of a small but increasing minority of pupils was becoming a concern. Concerted action and further development of the behaviour policy and its consistent implementation by staff has improved the situation.

Pupils report that teachers are firm in ensuring that good behaviour is the norm and episodes of poor behaviour are quickly tackled. They also report that staff are being much more robust in making sure that all pupils follow the uniform code. The majority of older pupils who spoke to inspectors consider that teachers are providing homework appropriately and there are clearer sanctions for not presenting homework on time. A small number of younger pupils do say that teachers inconsistently apply the homework policy, which they think is unfair. Leaders are now taking action to ensure a consistent approach across the school. Tackling such issues has resulted temporarily in more detentions and fixed period exclusions. Pupils given sanctions for misdemeanours have an improved offer in the 'Bridge' inclusion centre. Leaders have modified how long pupils attend the centre and are providing shorter, sharper reflection time and more purposeful work. Pupils are polite and willing to talk to visitors and answer questions. They report that they feel safe and well-informed about how to keep safe. As at the time of the last

monitoring inspection, they continue to talk positively about the support they can access from the care and guidance team and from their tutors. No safeguarding or safety concerns were found during the visit. Staff are well-trained in child protection procedures including in the school's statutory duties to understand, identify and take action to tackle any extremist or radical views. They also understand what to do if they consider a pupil is at risk of being subject to female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation or suddenly goes missing. There is good follow-up to identify the destinations of pupils who leave the school for any reason.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior and middle leaders are continuing to have a more strategic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. This is because there has been wholesale change in the systems and processes for analysing the school's work and for holding staff to account for the work they do. Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's work is more accurate as they are becoming more adept at checking what is working well and being clearer about what needs to improve and how they will make the required improvements. Leaders know that there is still much to do but are increasing their skills and, consequently, their capacity in driving the required improvements. They know that actions being taken need embedding further so that the impact of their work can be seen in improved outcomes and progress for pupils in all key stages and in narrowing the gaps between groups.

The raising achievement plan continues to be the key lever for improvement and is checked regularly to show progress against the actions being taken; a number of actions have been completed. Many of the targets in the plan are annual so it will not be until the outcomes of summer term assessments for younger year groups and the examination results for Year 11 and 13 pupils are known that the impact of actions will be fully measurable. However, leaders' regular checks on the quality of teaching, teachers' marking and feedback and the work pupils complete provide information on the progress they are making in achieving the aspirations in their plan. Reports on information gathered are considered at termly governing body meetings and at the monthly school advisory group meetings where the impact of actions taken by leaders is checked and where challenge is brought to bear when actions are not making a strong enough difference.

Staff are aware of the higher expectations leaders have of their work and their pupils' achievements and the majority are rising to these expectations. Where this is not the case, leaders have time-limited individual support plans to improve matters. The work to increase the rigour in teachers' performance management arrangements is starting to have bite and is linked securely to the achievements of pupils they teach. Arrangements are being adapted further to include evaluation against all of the national teachers' standards. Teachers welcome the rigour because it comes with the support to help them improve.

Governors continue to develop their skills in providing challenge to senior leaders and to hold them more robustly to account. The review of governance was complete before the last monitoring inspection and recommendations within the review are now part of the day-to-day work of the governing body. Recent minutes from the monthly school advisory group meetings show that governors' questioning and challenge is becoming much more focused on data and information presented to them. Governors are better informed about the work of the school through this approach, through the stronger links developed with faculty leaders and their evaluation of the reviews of subjects with the faculty leaders which individual governors are linked to. The Chair of Governing Body and vice-chair are working closely with the local authority to ensure a smooth transition to new governance arrangements when the school is no longer part of the Ashington Learning Partnership Trust.

External support

The school continues to receive support from two outstanding schools. Staff and leaders are benefiting from good practice, advice and support. This is helping to build capacity in the school's leadership and, as a result, the support is not as intensive as it was at the start of September. Support from the local authority's Commissioner for Teaching and Learning and school improvement partner continue to be valued. Leaders and governors welcomed the detailed report from the commissioner following his autumn review of the mathematics faculty and the necessary improvements identified. Governors also welcome the challenge the commissioner provides during the regular school advisory group meetings between local authority officers, governors and leaders in the school.