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Mr Steve Campbell
Acting principal
Seaton Burn College, A Specialist Business and Enterprise School
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Dear Steve

Special measures monitoring inspection of Seaton Burn College, A Specialist Business and Enterprise School

Following my visit with Gabrielle Reddington, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 May 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2015.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2015.

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better across all subjects and all key stages by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently take into account what pupils have already learned
 - teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially for the most- and least-able pupils
 - teachers' assessments are accurate
 - teachers' questioning skills are improved.

- Rapidly improve pupils' progress across all subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs by making sure that:
 - pupils' writing and presentation skills are developed
 - teachers' feedback consistently helps pupils to revise their work and understand exactly what they need to do next to improve
 - the key stage 3 curriculum builds securely on pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding, and prepares them for the increased demands of key stage 4
 - attendance is improved and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is reduced.

- Take swift action to improve the effectiveness of leaders and governors so they can drive rapid improvement by ensuring that:
 - leaders consistently use the information from the checks they do on the quality of teaching and pupils' work to plan for rapid improvement
 - a 'no-excuses' culture is developed and teachers and leaders are held robustly to account for pupils' progress
 - the long-term future of the college is secured by strengthening the senior leadership team
 - governors hold the college to account for the performance of all groups of pupils
 - new initiatives are planned, with clear success criteria and measurable 'milestones'.

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 the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 May 2016 to 26 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal, senior and middle leaders and groups of pupils. Inspectors also met a group of governors, local authority school improvement partners and senior leaders seconded to the school to support improvement. Inspectors scrutinised current progress information, school monitoring information, and key findings from the recent reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils.

Context

A deputy principal left the school in December 2015. A consultant headteacher has been working with the acting principal since October 2015. An assistant headteacher was seconded to the school in October 2015 to support teaching and learning and quality assurance, and a second assistant headteacher was seconded to the school in February 2016 to accelerate this process.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting principal, supported by the consultant headteacher and local authority partners, has acted swiftly to address areas for improvement. School leaders have worked with external partners to develop new systems and fortify existing practices. Middle leaders are now more rigorously involved in monitoring pupil progress and the quality of planning and assessment. The new head of sixth form is beginning to track the quality of teaching more closely. Regular review meetings between senior and middle leaders, informed by frequent checks on pupils' work and observations of teaching, are leading to higher standards of accountability for all staff. Teachers appreciate the intensive training, which they can see is beginning to have an impact on their practice. They value the support of leaders, who have sustained positive attitudes alongside the drive for rapid improvement.

School leaders have embraced the need to improve with urgency and openness, and no longer accept excuses for underperformance. They now track pupils' progress by the current standards that they are achieving in the classroom rather than over-generous predictions of what they may achieve in the future. Regular and more accurate assessment, reinforced by external moderation, is providing leaders with a clearer picture of pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are able to adapt teaching and coordinate interventions to address underperformance. While these approaches are leading to improving progress at key stage 4, this is not the case in Years 8 and 9, where stronger monitoring is still needed. Similarly, the close tracking of pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science is not matched in other subjects, where lower rates of attainment and progress need to be challenged. School leaders should reflect on ensuring a consistently good quality of teaching in wider foundation subjects when considering the introduction of new subjects in Year 9.

Leaders have acted on the recent review of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils, with stronger monitoring and subsequent interventions to address underperformance. These approaches are improving progress and narrowing gaps in attainment for these pupils in Year 11. However, leaders do not yet target the funding provided for these pupils with sufficient precision to gauge effectively the impact of their actions.

Leaders have responded to the recent review of governance by adding further expertise and developing their own, more rigorous, monitoring procedures. Governors are now following pupils' progress closely and no longer accept information at face value. Governors' training has strengthened their ability to hold leaders to account. They now have a more defined framework of what to look out for in their monitoring activities and make more frequent visits to the school. The chair and vice-chair of governors meet with school leaders and local authority leaders on a monthly basis as part of a raising achievement group, so that the ongoing impact of improvement plans can be checked.

While new leadership arrangements have started to build internal capacity for improvement, uncertainty exists over how the school will be led in the future. Leaders, governors and external partners are sustaining the necessary focus on improvement priorities, but it remains important that these uncertainties are resolved in order for continuing improvement to be sustained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improvements are evident in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, but weaknesses remain. A whole-school focus on improving lesson planning through shared approaches is making teachers take into account the different starting points of pupils in their classes. Increasing purpose is evident in many lessons, and pupils commented on a more 'intense' focus on learning. Some teachers are using higher-quality questioning to deepen understanding, particularly in lessons involving the most able, where pupils themselves are questioning one another to probe and extend their thinking. This was evident in science lessons, where pupils were encouraged to question resources, texts and one another before asking the teacher. However, where teaching is less effective, questioning does little more than check basic understanding of content and does not challenge misconceptions.

New assessment practices are having a sharper impact on pupils' progress. Pupils now routinely accept the importance of acting on their teacher's feedback in order to improve the quality of their work. This was particularly evident in English books, where pupils are engaging in meaningful dialogue with their teachers to improve their writing and responses to texts. While these new structures are in place, they are not used with consistent effectiveness across all subjects, as some teachers still offer vague feedback that does not support progress.

The quality of teaching is improving more rapidly in key stage 4 as teachers are planning and assessing rigorously so that pupils experience better outcomes. Current progress in Year 11 shows improvement, reflecting more focused teaching and higher aspirations. These improvements are not as strong in Year 8 and Year 9, where planning is weaker and too many lessons still lack challenge.

Pupils are beginning to experience increasing opportunities to write at length in subjects other than English. This was apparent in subjects such as science, geography and physical education, where pupils were using frameworks to structure their writing more effectively.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have worked intensively to raise levels of attendance. They have explored new systems and approaches with external partners. New positive strategies, including the use of rewards, have increased whole-school attendance. Targeted actions and heightened home-school liaison have supported vulnerable pupils with more deep-rooted attendance issues. As a result, attendance rates across the school are improving, including those for pupils eligible for the pupil premium and pupils with special educational needs or disability. In some cases, rates of persistent absence have halved. As expectations of higher attendance increase, leaders will need to ensure that these new systems to improve attendance are continuing to make a difference.

Since October's inspection, pupils believe that there is a stricter atmosphere around the school and that sanctions are imposed more robustly. These stricter expectations extend to a better quality of presentation in many books, with pupils showing an increasing pride in their work. Key stage 4 pupils felt there was a stronger focus on learning, but lower school pupils still felt that there were occasions where low-level disruption could impede their learning. A new rewards system has already contributed to improving attendance, although this needs further refinement for pupils to get the most from the system. Leaders continue to work strongly to support pupils' welfare, and safeguarding is effective.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils are making more rapid progress in English, mathematics and science in Year 11. This is through better planning, improved tracking of pupil progress and targeted intervention. Current grades are now grounded in more rigorous processes, including common assessment tasks, internal and external moderation, and sharper scrutiny of work. While these changes are leading to signs of increased progress in key stage 4 and in Year 7, this is not the case in Years 8 and 9, nor in some of those non-core subjects where outcomes for pupils remain of the utmost importance.

School leaders have responded to their review of the use of pupil premium funding by tracking the progress of disadvantaged pupils more closely and making teachers more responsible for their outcomes. As a result, these pupils are making stronger progress in English and mathematics in Year 11 and achieving better overall outcomes. There is evidence that pupils with special educational needs or disability are making stronger progress, as are the most able. Such progress remains less secure in Years 8 and 9, as the focus is not as strong in these years as it is for key examination groups.

In Years 12 and 13, there are signs that academic progress is improving and that the gaps against achievement in vocational courses are closing, although progress in vocational subjects is not as strong as in 2015.

External support

The local authority has effectively brokered arrangements to increase leadership capacity, with the secondment of a consultant headteacher and two assistant headteachers with expertise in teaching and learning and quality assurance. It has also provided subject specialists to train and develop subject leaders and increase the accuracy of school assessment and evaluation. The local authority has strengthened governance by supporting the recruitment of new governors with the expertise to challenge leaders and hold them to account. Staff value the support provided and this has helped to maintain positive morale as the school addresses its improvement priorities.