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Mrs Sandra Graham
Haltwhistle Community Campus Upper School
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Dear Mrs Graham

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Haltwhistle Community
Campus Upper School**

Following my visit to your academy on 7 and 8 July 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 not taking effective action towards the
removal of special measures.**

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 chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner 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 that 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 third monitoring inspection on 7 to 8 July 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher; leaders responsible for English, mathematics and special educational needs and/or disabilities; the parent and family support worker; two governors, including the chair of the governing body; a group of pupils; a group of staff and two representatives from Bright Tribe, the incoming sponsor. Her Majesty's Inspector also held three telephone conversations with: a governor; a national leader of education providing school-to-school support and the chief executive officer of Bright Tribe. The inspector visited seven classrooms to observe learning, speak to pupils informally about their experiences of school and scrutinise the current level of work in pupils' books. Senior leaders accompanied the inspector on four of these visits. They also looked closely at a range of pupils' writing within English and across the curriculum, alongside the inspector. A wide range of documentation was evaluated, including improvement planning and the academy's own analysis of pupils' current attainment, progress and attendance.

Context

One member of staff has returned to work after a prolonged period of illness, and two others remain absent. These classes continue to be covered by supply staff. The acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, head of English and two other teachers will leave the school at the end of the summer term. Bright Tribe, as the new sponsor for the academy from September 2016, is in the process of recruiting staff to fill these positions. Three learning support assistants have also had their short-term contracts terminated. Pupil numbers continue to fall. There are now approximately one quarter less pupils in school than at the beginning of the year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have been unable to maintain the pace of change seen at the previous inspection. Despite their considerable effort and clear commitment to pupils, the school and its community, significant weaknesses persist: pupils' attainment and progress in English remain woefully low, disadvantaged pupils continue to receive a raw deal and the quality of teaching continues to be weak in too many subjects.

In part, acting senior leaders have been hindered over the last term by a lack of clarity about the future position of the school. A slower process of re-sponsoring than expected has led to an unsettled period of time for leaders, staff and pupils. There are now clearer and firmer plans in place for September, when a new sponsor will take over the leadership and management of the school.

While leaders have certainly been busy over the last term, their actions have not

had the desired impact on pupils or staff. Monitoring and evaluation of new strategies, the quality of teaching and the impact of professional development on classroom practice lack the focus and rigour needed to raise the quality of teachers' work quickly. Leaders' evaluations do not focus on the elements of teaching, especially in English, that will bring about greatest improvement. Too many teachers remain in the dark about the true quality of their work, because the advice and guidance they receive is superficial and communicated to them without any sense of urgency. Across the school, a sharp insight into what is preventing disadvantaged pupils from making the rapid gains needed to catch up with their peers has been unacceptably missing for three terms. This group of pupils continues to perform poorly.

Leaders do not see the importance of a more analytical approach to self-evaluation. While information is routinely collected and logged, such as that about attendance, it is not interrogated effectively. For instance, leaders are unclear about whether the actions of the parent and family support worker are targeted at the right families and, indeed, making the significant difference they hope for. Even in the more routine analysis of pupils' attainment and progress information, where leaders have rated progress in reading, writing and aspects of science as 'red' – because outcomes have not hit the ambitious targets they have set for themselves each half term – there is no investigation or cross-checking of information to truly understand what has gone wrong. Governors, in particular, are confused about the reasons for the continued slow progress that pupils make.

Detailed support plans to improve each teacher's practice are now in place. However, they are not driving improvement at the pace needed, because while actions are rightly focused on teaching, the success measures do not link to improved pupil outcomes. Staff are being held to account for implementing an approach or policy rather than whether it is making any difference to pupils' learning and progress. Although appraisal systems are more developed, they remain in their infancy and are not due for review until the autumn term. Checking the quality of teachers' work needs to be far more frequent and far more focused if all staff are to raise their game to a sufficiently acceptable level.

Governors are now asking more pertinent questions of the acting headteacher as their knowledge of school performance information has grown. New additions to the governing body have brought a keen eye to the unpicking of this assessment information and the confidence and rigour to challenge over aspects of weaker practice. However, the acting headteacher's reports to the governing body prioritise sporting achievements and community events before school improvement and pupils' outcomes. Governors have not insisted on a change to this list of priorities, nor have they pursued a more detailed response to their questions, particularly around concerns for disadvantaged pupils. They have realised too late that the acting headteacher has not conducted a rigorous enough analysis of these issues to provide any greater insight into what needs to be done. Governors have not held leaders fully to account.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The overall quality of teaching remains weak, with significant variations between subjects, year groups and staff. This has resulted in widening gaps between English and mathematics and a continued trend of poor performance, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have been unable to turn around the classroom practice of the weakest teachers, and pupils' outcomes have suffered.

Despite a raft of measures that leaders have brought in to address weaknesses, their consistent implementation has been thwarted by significant staff absence. Information provided by leaders shows that over 200 teaching days have been lost this academic year alone. While supply staff have always been secured quickly when needed, this has made consistent application of school initiatives difficult. Leaders' monitoring of supply staff, even when long term, has not been rigorous.

When teaching and pupils' learning are at their weakest, teachers have considerably low expectations of what pupils can achieve. For example, Year 6 pupils were observed being asked to write five simple sentences about themselves. Across classes, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were seen to be copying sentences without any expectation to think more carefully for themselves. Importantly, the monitoring of books over time has not revealed these inadequacies to teachers, because the process has been focused on the implementation of policy rather than the heightened quality they should bring.

Teachers do not plan their lessons carefully enough. Pupils' learning over time, as shown by the work in their books, lacks any sense of progression, particularly in English. Leaders acknowledge that they have not looked at pupils' work in this way before. As a result, the same tasks are often completed across year groups, so that pupils on track to reach the expectations for their age in Year 5 and Year 8, were asked to complete the same task without any increase in difficulty or complexity. This compounds the slow progress seen in pupils' reading and writing skills.

The most able pupils are not challenged or stretched in lessons to reach their full potential. Staff have a mind-set that these pupils should be given extra, more demanding, work only when they have completed the same activities as everyone else. This wastes time and risks these pupils switching off from their learning, as they complete tasks they have already mastered.

Mathematics teaching in Year 6 and Year 8 cannot be characterised by such weaknesses. Teaching here has improved considerably. Frequent use of models and images enables pupils to visualise abstract concepts, such as trigonometry or algebra, and tackle complex problems readily and at pace. Questioning is focused and direct, to elicit what pupils do and do not understand, so that the lesson can be reshaped to make greater gains in learning. However, mathematics elsewhere in the school has not been as strong. The head of department is aware that for the

effective work in Year 6 and Year 8 to have maximum impact, there needs to be greater consistency in the subject across the campus, particularly in addressing staff misconceptions about how different topics should be taught.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' social behaviours remain a positive feature of the school. Pupils are polite, caring and willing to learn, and their learning behaviours are also improving. Despite weaknesses in teaching, pupils apply themselves diligently to their tasks. This is especially the case when they are clear about what they are learning and complete activities that get them to think for themselves. Even when pupils are presented with tasks that are too easy or too difficult for their current ability, they persevere and remain committed to completing what has been asked of them. This willing and compliant nature is not being capitalised on by leaders and staff. Pupils are eager and keen to work hard, but they are not being presented with the right level of work to allow them to flourish.

Attendance is improving overall but more disadvantaged pupils have been absent this year than last. This goes some way to explaining the continued slow progress of this group of pupils. Leaders have not made this connection because no analysis has been done around this aspect of work. While the parent and family support worker is reaching out and working in partnership with other professionals and the community, there is no rigorous evaluation of this approach to know if it is making as big a difference as is needed.

The learning environment has improved since the last monitoring visit. Pupils themselves have noticed the more vibrant displays of their work. Within classrooms, there has been a greater effort to ensure that displays support learning, through word banks, calculation strategies or reinforcement of what it means to be working at age-related expectations. Pupils are also rising to the challenge of better presentation. All those spoken to during the inspection knew the expectations of the 'platinum presentation' policy, though a number acknowledged that they were not always reminded of this when completing their work.

Opportunities to develop pupils' aspirations and ambitions for the future have also been strengthened. Visitors to assemblies, from a range of professional backgrounds, as well as visits to conferences, such as in science, have all helped to widen pupils' views about what it is possible for them to achieve. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said that this approach had prompted them to think more carefully about their future and the importance of 'sticking-in' at school. The quality of teaching now needs to improve dramatically if pupils are to realise their new-found ambitions by the time they leave the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' attainment in reading and writing remains weak across the school and most noticeably in Year 5. In a number of year groups, there are fewer pupils reaching age-related expectations at the end of the year than at the start. These pupils are falling behind rather than catching up quickly. The proportions of pupils making expected and above expected progress from their starting points also remains weak. Pupils are not making the accelerated progress needed to enable them to make up the lost ground of previous years and make their ambitions for the future a reality. The targets set by leaders for each half term assessment checkpoint have been missed on each and every occasion. This has not prompted greater analysis or inquiry by leaders, governors or staff.

The gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers have shown little sign of improvement. In some cases, school assessment information reveals that the gaps have narrowed, but on closer analysis, this is due to non-disadvantaged pupils regressing and disadvantaged pupils' outcomes remaining stubbornly low. Leaders and governors were unaware of this reason, unwittingly celebrating a hollow success.

Weaknesses in English are not being addressed across the curriculum. Some staff are yet to understand the role they play in raising standards in this subject and spelling errors, grammatical inaccuracy and incorrect use of vocabulary often go unchecked in these subjects. Improving reading and writing is not seen as 'everyone's business'.

Pupils' outcomes in mathematics show a more positive picture, with the school's ambitious targets being met in nearly every year group. Outcomes overall within the subject are now broadly average. Pupils show an increasing confidence in using their mathematical skills and knowledge to think through more taxing problems for themselves. Pupils particularly appreciate the opportunity to move on to more difficult work when they themselves think they are ready. Tasks that are grounded in the 'real-life' application of mathematics are also strengthening their appreciation of how this subject will benefit them in later life.

External support

The school-to-school support initiated in the previous term has not continued at the same pace. Now that the final few teachers have finished their programme of joint visits to Ponteland Middle School, partnership working has ended. While leaders have not conducted an informed analysis of this work, to know if such joint working was useful, school assessment information indicates that it has not had the impact on pupils' outcomes or the quality of teaching that was intended.

As the re-sponsoring of the academy has become more concrete, staff have appreciated the opportunity to visit another Bright Tribe school to learn more about

the sponsor and how it works with schools in a similar position. This has helped allay any potential fears and concerns among staff.