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10 January 2017

Dr Judith Greene  
Executive headteacher  
Haltwhistle Community Campus Upper School  
Haltwhistle  
Northumberland  
NE49 9BA

Dear Dr Greene

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

Following my visit to your school on 8–9 December 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing board, 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 8–9 December 2016**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and head of upper school (senior leaders); leaders responsible for mathematics and special educational needs and/or disabilities; two members of the governing board; a group of pupils; and a group of staff. Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) also held a telephone conversation with a teacher providing external support to staff and observed a whole-school celebration assembly. HMI visited eight classrooms to observe learning; speak to pupils informally about their experiences of school; and scrutinise the current level of work in pupils' books. All of these visits were conducted jointly with the executive headteacher or the head of upper school. A wide range of documentation, including improvement planning and the school's own analysis of pupils' current attainment, progress and attendance was evaluated.

### **Context**

The acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and head of English left the school at the end of the summer term. An executive headteacher, employed by the incoming sponsor (Bright Tribe Trust), and a head of upper school, employed by the governing board of the school, took up post in September 2016 to support the transition to the new sponsor and ensure leadership stability. Both of these posts will continue once the re-sponsoring process has been completed by April 2017. A technology teacher, shared with the lower school, also joined the school at the beginning of the academic year. At the time of the inspection, three classes were being taught by supply staff, two of whom were on long-term contracts. The head of upper school is currently undertaking the head of English role while a suitable replacement is recruited.

During the second half of the autumn term, senior leaders undertook a significant review of the school's curriculum and organisation. The timings and duration of lessons were adjusted and many teachers moved classes, some teaching new year groups and subjects for the first time. The Year 5 class, in particular, moved from an outbuilding into the main school accommodation. This year group are now taught as one class and are following the same, new curriculum as the lower school, to aid transition and support continuity of learning.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The executive headteacher and head of upper school are ambitious for what the school can achieve. Together, they have begun to reverse the fortunes of the school and ensure a higher standard of education across the campus. While there remains a significant amount of work to be done, senior leaders are showing the tenacity, insight and capacity for improvement that has been so desperately missing over previous terms. Leaders are acutely aware that much time has been wasted in the

school's special measures journey to date. The executive headteacher and the head of upper school show the resolve and determination that is needed to grasp the challenges still being faced by the school after 18 months in special measures. They have rightly developed a new vision for what pupils and staff can achieve, as a way of kick-starting a new era in the school's history and transforming the long-engrained culture of low standards and even lower expectations.

Senior leaders have prioritised the improvement of teaching in their first 12 weeks in post. At the heart of this strategy lies a bespoke programme of professional development, the regular checking of classroom practice and the opportunity for frequent discussions between senior leaders and staff about how well individual pupils are progressing. Importantly, this cycle has already been completed twice, providing constant feedback to the senior team about the acceptance of new ways of working by staff and the difference they are making to the day-to-day experiences of pupils.

Senior leaders are accurate in their current view of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They have a finely tuned sense of what is working well and who is rising to the higher expectations of practice that have been set. The head of school, in particular, is a visible presence around the building, taking every opportunity – formally and informally – to sit in on lessons and see through pupils' eyes the quality and impact of the teaching they receive. These quick checks are complemented by more sustained 'book looks' to obtain a true sense of the difference teaching is making to pupils' learning and progress over time. Staff are now receiving the frank and honest feedback needed to realise where their teaching has been lacking previously. Bespoke training enables any shortcomings to be addressed quickly. Inspection confirms senior leaders' view that teaching is now beginning to improve. While these 'green shoots' of success are pleasing, senior leaders recognise that there is more to be done to embed the raft of changes introduced recently and ensure they become the norm.

The value of developing other leaders within the school, to support the drive for constant improvement, has not gone unrecognised. Senior leaders understand that they will need to delegate responsibility in the long-term, if they are to achieve everything they have outlined in their focused improvement plan. To support the development of this next layer of leadership, all staff have joined the head of school on learning walks and 'book looks'. This has given them a first taste, in many instances, of casting a critical eye over the quality of teaching and evaluating the success of what they have seen on pupils' outcomes. This is not only developing important leadership skills for the future but also helping teachers themselves to become more self-critical of their own classroom practice.

The governing board have worked well during the last few months to secure a stable leadership structure for the school. They have ensured continuity in the coming months by employing members, or prospective members, of Bright Tribe Trust, as interim senior leaders who will continue when the sponsorship plans are

completed. Governors already recognise the difference that the new leadership team have brought to their own work. They now receive a weekly pack of correspondence, sharing with them the calendar, training packs and messages that staff have all received, so they are fully aware of what is happening, and when. This has allowed the board to ask far more probing questions of leaders, as they have a greater appreciation of what is happening in school. In addition, training delivered by the executive headteacher around data analysis has given governors the confidence to challenge senior leaders about their plans to address the differences in outcomes between subjects, year groups and pupil groups. The implementation of governor links to subjects and key stages has also provided a mechanism for governors to follow up on their questions, by talking to a wider range of leaders and staff within school. They no longer accept the word of the head of school without question, especially where they have concerns, for example around the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching is beginning to improve but it remains highly variable. While professional development, accountability mechanisms and staff appraisal are much improved, the new strategies introduced to staff will take time to embed before they become a natural and confident part of daily practice. Senior leaders are aware that the momentum of change built over the last 12 weeks will need to be maintained for the inconsistencies between subjects, year groups and pupil groups to be eradicated. Importantly, staff show they are willing to rise to the challenge because they appreciate the clarity of direction now being given by senior leaders and value the quality of professional development and coaching being provided.

Where classroom practice is improving quickest, staff have a greater understanding of the age-related expectations for the year group and subject they are teaching. As such, they are better equipped to plan lessons that meet pupils' overall needs and move them on quickly from their different starting points. A growing number of teachers are now able to provide a range of activities to meet the range of abilities and needs in their class, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Teachers are less successful at adapting a lesson – mid-flow – when they realise, often from a pupils' response, that they are finding the content too easy or too difficult.

Teaching remains weak where lessons fail to acknowledge that, even within an ability set, pupils need different tasks to challenge their thinking and allow them to reach their full potential from different starting points. In some instances, staff still hold the mentality that the most able pupils must complete the same tasks as everyone else before moving on to more tricky concepts. Some see providing greater challenge as having an extra task 'up your sleeve', to be used only when everything else has been completed. This wastes valuable time and prevents pupils from making as much progress as they should.

Learning support assistants (LSA) are generally used well to support pupils' learning within lessons. LSAs are now more confident to ask questions and prompt pupils to think for themselves rather than providing answers, which they have done too readily in the past. This is promoting better learning for the pupils they support, in part because LSAs now attend the same professional development and training as teaching staff, with everyone involved in pupils' education hearing the same messages and learning about the same strategies to promote deeper thinking. Senior leaders are clear that the next step change in practice is to build pupils' independence during LSA supported sessions so that they do not become reliant on adult intervention.

Year 5 have undergone significant change in the last six weeks. Different teaching staff, a new curriculum and a move to the main campus building are all helping to strengthen the quality of this crucial first year of upper school. Team work and the shared ambition for success among the three staff who work exclusively with this larger class provide a strong sense that these new working arrangements are settling well and providing a better foundation for the accelerated learning and progress that is needed for this age of pupils.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils' social behaviours continue to impress. Pupils are unfailingly polite, caring and respectful of both adults and peers. This creates an inclusive and productive atmosphere where pupils are eager to learn and keen to work hard. Leaders recognise that, over the last few weeks, staff have begun to recognise these positive dispositions and attitudes among pupils so that they can capitalise upon them during lessons to promote a better rate of learning and progress.

Despite this more favourable starting position, senior leaders have not been complacent in wanting to improve this area also. For example, the head of school has ensured there are a greater range of mechanisms for pupils to express an opinion and request change of their own. He has quickly been recognised by pupils as someone who will listen openly and act quickly to resolve issues and concerns. Seemingly small changes, such as allowing pupils to sit on the bleachers rather than the floor or opening up the school hall for hot drinks and snacks at break, are at the heart of pupils' comments that, 'We are treated like responsible adults and trusted to behave sensibly in our own school.' Learning behaviours are also improving as teaching itself improves and staff expect more from pupils at the very start of every lesson.

Celebration assemblies are a whole-school occasion that unites leaders, staff and pupils for a common cause – to recognise those who have worked the hardest and achieved particularly well each week. The head of school uses these opportunities insightfully to promote positive learning messages and remind all of those in attendance, teachers included, of the recently implemented strategies he will be looking to reward in the coming week. This primes the whole school community to

buy in to the improvements being made and contribute to the forward momentum that is building quickly and taking the school forward.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

Pupils' outcomes are now improving, albeit slowly. Provisional, statutory assessment results for Year 6 in 2016 show that there remains a significant way to travel before all pupils are receiving the high quality of education they deserve. Pupils' progress in reading places the school significantly below the national average and within the bottom 10% of schools overall for those pupils who reached standards that were typical for their age at the end of Year 2, including disadvantaged pupils.

Disadvantaged pupils who reached standards that were typical for their age at the end of key stage 1 in mathematics also made significantly less progress than similar pupils nationally. A job of work remains to be done to ensure these pupils catch up quickly during key stage 3 and that those currently in Year 6 do not repeat the poor performance of the past.

While differences between groups remain wide, the school's current assessment information shows that they are beginning to diminish as leaders and staff shine a brighter spotlight on the ways of addressing specific pupils' learning needs during lessons. For example, regular meetings with staff every three weeks have ensured all teachers are aware of the pupils in their classes who are vulnerable to underachievement, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Professional development sessions have picked up on how to teach in a way that allows all pupils, regardless of background or starting points, to make faster progress.

Inconsistencies in outcomes between English and mathematics, and between younger pupils and older pupils, remain. Strategies to address these differences in attainment and progress are only just in their infancy and will need greater time to develop and embed before a true picture of their effectiveness can be evaluated.

The quality of English teaching remains a pressing concern, both as a subject in its own right and as the vehicle to support learning across all other subjects. Recent, external training and coaching is yet to make as big a difference as needed, across the school, although staff now appreciate the role they must play, whatever their subject, in addressing pupils' reading and writing difficulties. While pupils enjoy reading and regularly access a well-stocked library, senior leaders acknowledge that a whole-school strategy for teaching reading, especially vocabulary, is needed to ensure that all staff teach such a core skill consistently. All pupils need to be equipped with the tools to infer the correct meaning from what they read when working independently.

In contrast, mathematics teaching continues to go from strength to strength, across the campus. The head of department's ambition to continually improve and reach the highest of standards for pupils ensures that change is readily accepted and

practice never stands still. This continual improvement in mathematics means that English will have to significantly raise its game so that it does not slip even further behind.

### **External support**

Senior leaders have relied on a network of previous colleagues to provide much-needed external support in their first few weeks in post. Teachers from a range of other schools have supported planning sessions with staff, starting with those who have changed year group or subject, and delivered whole-school training sessions. Staff have appreciated the support they have received to turn their own professional learning into a reality in the classroom. Leaders plan to increase this classroom-based coaching in the next term so that all staff have the chance to see an expert teacher in action with Haltwhistle pupils and observe the taught strategies being used in the same environment and conditions that they themselves are expected to work. Careful monitoring and evaluation of this approach will reveal whether this investment of time and money is making as big a difference to teaching and pupils' outcomes as is needed, especially in English.