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Mr Steve Campbell
Acting principal
Seaton Burn College, A Specialist Business and Enterprise School
Dudley Lane
Seaton Burn
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
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Dear Mr Campbell

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Seaton Burn College, A Specialist Business and Enterprise School

Following my visit with Daniel Murray, Ofsted Inspector, and Steve Shaw, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 28 November 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned that the school had not been brokered by an academy chain despite the judgement that it required special measures in October 2015. The first monitoring inspection took place over a year ago in June 2016. The focus of this inspection was to evaluate the impact of actions taken by leaders to address the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection and the progress made by leaders since the first monitoring inspection.

Evidence

Inspectors met with you, other senior leaders, groups of staff and representatives from the interim executive board (governing body arrangements). They also held discussions with a representative from the local authority, and the executive principal and chair of trustees from Gosforth Academy. Inspectors visited a range of lessons and reviewed pupils' work. They spoke to pupils' informally in lessons and at break and lunchtime and spoke formally to two groups of pupils. The inspection team scrutinised a range of documents including the record of checks on the suitability of staff to work with children, the school's improvement plan, minutes of

the interim executive board meetings and information regarding pupils' attainment, progress and attendance.

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

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

Context

Seaton Burn is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, requiring additional school support is below average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is broadly average.

Since the previous monitoring inspection in June 2016, there has been a significant turnover in staff. Over 14 teachers have left and new teachers have been recruited. From September 2015 until the end of 2016, senior staff from five different local schools were deployed by North Tyneside council to support leaders. The regional school's commissioner used her statutory powers and removed the governing body in the autumn term 2016 and put in place an interim executive board. Gosforth Academy was secured as the preferred sponsor. It is planned that Seaton Burn will become part of Gosforth Federated Academies trust in January 2018. Since the spring term 2017, school-to-school support has been provided by staff from the trust. Two senior leaders from the trust have been deployed onto the senior leadership team. They will continue in these roles once the school converts to an academy.

Following the previous monitoring visit, delays in becoming an academy, staff turmoil and the effect of various leaders supporting the school, each offering differing advice, caused a temporary interruption in the school's journey to improvement. Stronger governance arrangements, increased leadership capacity and effective school-to-school support since spring 2017 are moving the school forward again. Leaders recognise that actions taken were too late to make a tangible difference to the outcomes and progress of Year 11 pupils in the summer 2017 examinations, or any improvement to pupils' attendance rates. Nevertheless, there is evidence of stronger improvement in other year groups, particularly in key stage 3 and the current Year 11.

Considerable training of staff and more robust arrangements to manage the performance of staff, alongside the successful recruitment of specialist teachers are improving the quality of teaching effectively. This, in turn, is ensuring that more pupils are making good progress in their learning across the curriculum. Improvements to the key stage 3 curriculum have ensured that it is broadly based and is developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding effectively. It is also building pupils' confidence and expectations of what they can achieve through

additional short accredited courses that interest and engage them. Systems to assess pupils' learning and progress have been refined further since the last monitoring inspection and are now in place across all subjects. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are increasing, but practice is still variable.

Alongside teachers' regular assessments of pupils' work, seating plans identify individual pupils' different needs and targets. These are aimed at helping teachers to identify the pupils that may need an extra challenge or additional support. Teachers are more adept in using this information to plan learning to move pupils on from what they currently know and understand. In the most successful learning, teachers hone their questions to the different abilities of pupils and therefore provide additional challenge through the questions that pupils have to think about and answer. In such learning, teachers refine activities to make sure that pupils are stretched as soon as they start their work. However, inspection evidence shows that the good practice evident in some classes is not embedded in all. This means that work is sometimes too easy for the most able pupils and too hard for the least able. This slows the pace of learning for both groups. You and your leaders are aware of this and are taking action to improve matters.

Pupils' presentation of their work is still variable, although pupils said that it is improving because teachers check it when they mark their work. Teachers do not check consistently whether presentation is up to scratch and, as a result, in some lessons work becomes untidy, but not unreadable.

Improving the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is a continued priority of leaders because the progress of these pupils has not been good enough over time. More carefully planned additional intervention sessions and support in lessons are starting to hasten pupils' progress, but leaders know that it is too soon to see the full impact of this work. Leaders also accept that the required review of pupil premium funding and the use of this funding to support disadvantaged pupils' learning have not been effective. In 2017, Year 11 disadvantaged pupils made insufficient progress from their starting points in the school. Significant challenge from the interim executive board in September has resulted in a refocusing of this additional resource and in the actions taken to improve matters. The needs of pupils currently in school are being better met through the improvements in the quality of teaching and the focus that staff have on these pupils in class. Again, it is too soon to see the full impact of actions taken.

Relationships between pupils and staff are generally cordial, and lessons are usually calm and purposeful. Pupils are polite and friendly, holding doors open to visitors and keen to share their views. Pupils reported that teaching has improved and they are able to understand more clearly what they need to learn because of the regular feedback they receive from teachers. Pupils also reported that they are learning more in lessons because of improvements made to the behaviour policy and its focus on rewarding good behaviour instead of punishing misbehaviour. They feel safe in school and consider that incidents of very poor or dangerous behaviour are

rare.

Attendance rates have not improved over time and remain below those found nationally. The appointment of the behaviour and attendance leader in the spring term has provided a strong impetus for improvement. Systems and work to track pupils at risk of not attending are clearer, and actions taken with pupils and their families are timelier. Pupils all reported on the more positive atmosphere in school, and this is encouraging them to attend more regularly and take a more active part in their learning. Pupils and staff reported that there has been a step-change in the culture and expectations within the school and it is far better than a year ago. Leaders know that there is still much to do before Seaton Burn can be judged a good school. Their refined plans for improvement are focusing appropriately on the actions that are needed to improve the school rapidly from its interrupted journey.

You, as acting principal, and your deputy principal have faced significant turmoil in staffing as you have taken resolute action to eradicate poor teaching and improve its quality across the academy in the past year. The appointment of two senior leaders from the trust to the school has enabled you to get on with the strategic leadership of the school and work with senior leaders to get the school moving again. The balanced support from Gosforth Academy and consequent removal of wide-ranging advice from the myriad of leaders previously supporting the school have contributed to the current improvements. Staff reported that there is now clarity on what is expected of them. Training, coaching and regular monitoring of their work by senior and middle leaders are helping to improve their practice. This monitoring is holding them to account more rigorously for the impact of their work on pupils' learning in class.

Middle leaders are developing their roles effectively and reported that they are now more empowered to take action to manage staff performance and to quality assure their own team's effectiveness. They and your senior leaders are held to account more rigorously by the interim executive board. The board demands and receives detailed reports on the progress that pupils are making across the school in their attendance and behaviour. The board has a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Minutes of board meetings show the challenge that members bring to bear and the expectations they have that you and your leaders will respond to their requests for information and evidence of the school's work and improvements. The governing body review was conducted in a timely way, but the governing body was disbanded before the resulting action plan could be implemented. The interim executive board members have a wealth of skills and expertise. They are using these well to challenge you and your leaders to ensure that the school improves so that it meets the needs of the pupils in its care and to ensure that pupils are safe. Transition arrangements to the new trust are in place.

External support

The measured support from Gosforth Academy since spring term 2017 has contributed to improvements seen in the quality of teaching and pupils' learning and behaviour, and in the development of middle leadership. Senior leaders have valued the support from local authority specialist advisers for English, mathematics and science, who have contributed to the improvements in leadership of these subjects effectively.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders should ensure that the pupil premium strategy and reviews of this strategy identify precisely the targets for, and impact of those targets on, improving the rates of progress. This is to ensure that governors and the trust can hold leaders fully to account for the impact of the pupil premium funding.
- Leaders should take further, urgent actions to increase the attendance rates of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, 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

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector