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Mr Steve Wilkes
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilkes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Berwick Academy

Following my visit with Lee Elliott, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 17 to 18 July 2018, 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 January 2018.

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

the trust's statement of action is fit for purpose

the school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2018

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that all pupils make good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about pupils' prior attainment more effectively to plan specifically for pupils' different abilities, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able
 - removing the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school
 - making sure that evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning made by all leaders are accurate
 - ensuring that leaders raise their expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - ensuring that senior leaders and governors plan effectively to diminish the differences in outcomes and attendance between disadvantaged pupils and those of other pupils nationally
 - checking that the use of extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils is rigorously evaluated
 - making sure that the governing body is more effective at holding leaders to account by checking carefully that agreed actions have had sufficient impact.

- Further develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that all groups of pupils make strong progress across a wide range of subjects by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations for what pupils can achieve across all subjects and year groups
 - use the school's systems for managing behaviour consistently well and that lessons constantly engage pupils in their learning
 - develop their questioning skills so that they ask probing questions that help all pupils, including boys and disadvantaged pupils in particular, to deepen their understanding and provide extended oral responses
 - make effective use of accurate pupil assessment information to deliver teaching over time that is engaging and challenging, including for boys, the most able and disadvantaged pupils
 - check that pupils understand clearly how well they are achieving and what they need to improve, in line with the school's marking and assessment policy
 - consistently tackle and support pupils' weaknesses in literacy
 - share the good practice that is already available in the school.

- Urgently act to develop a culture of safeguarding in the school through improving

pupils' behaviour and attendance by ensuring that:

- all adults consistently apply the school's behaviour policy and challenge any poor behaviour around the school site
- all pupils and groups of pupils attend school at rates similar to or better than the national averages, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- greater attention is paid to checking that actions taken by the school and other professionals and agencies are having the desired impact and are shared effectively with all those involved to inform the school's approaches to safeguarding pupils
- the school develops a transparent and open approach that ensures that pupils, parents and carers are confident that safeguarding concerns are dealt with and resolved.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 to 18 July 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders and a group of middle leaders. Telephone calls took place with the chair of the governing body and the chair of the academy management committee. Inspectors also met with a group of staff and a group of support staff. They met formally with three groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in class and around the school. They observed teaching and learning, completed an extensive work scrutiny and observed pupils' behaviour as they arrived at school and at break and lunchtimes.

Inspectors looked at a range of documents including the trust's statement of action, the school's improvement plan, record of pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievement, examples of leaders' monitoring activities and safeguarding documents. Inspectors considered the progress the school has made towards the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Context

The acting headteacher took up post on 1 March 2018; prior to this he was the substantive deputy headteacher. The current senior leadership team includes the acting headteacher, a temporary assistant headteacher and two substantive assistant headteachers. There are eight staff leaving at the end of the summer term and there are two new staff joining the school in September. The school is currently fully staffed for September 2018. The governing body has seen some turbulence since the previous inspection and this is providing an inconsistency in the support and challenge necessary to bring about urgent and rapid improvement.

At the time of the monitoring inspection, Year 10 pupils and Year 12 students were completing work experience. Year 9 pupils were involved in personal development activities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Under challenging circumstances, some of which have been out of senior leaders' control, the pace for addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection has been too slow. However, the acting headteacher and other senior leaders have put in place an improvement plan that is steering the school on its improvement journey. Nonetheless, there are still some important areas identified at the previous inspection where the effect is limited. For example, improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes are yet to be recognised. Despite this, the acting headteacher is determined to quicken the pace of improvement and raise standards. He is supported by his senior team who are working together decisively and strategically to effect change.

As of March 2018, senior leaders' roles and responsibilities were clarified. As a result, lines of accountability are clear and senior leaders have put strategic plans in place so that they can hit the ground running come September 2018, particularly in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Following the previous inspection, senior leaders have taken critical action to improve safeguarding practices and standards of behaviour. As a result of these actions, most pupils say that they now feel safe and are experiencing less disruption in their lessons. Teachers and support staff feel supported by senior leaders and are now managing behaviour well and with some consistency; however, leaders acknowledge and pupils report that some staff are not dealing with behaviour consistently and adhering to the school's policy.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium funding, completed in June 2018, provides clear guidance and recommendations to support the school's work. However, there continues to be no action plan in place to improve this important area of the school's work and therefore it is not clear how funding is used, evaluated or indeed whether or not it is having a positive effect. Senior leaders acknowledge that there remains a lot of work still to do to improve the opportunities and chances of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school.

Middle leaders are developing as they begin to recognise their roles in improving the quality of teaching, and subsequently standards and raising expectations of staff. Middle leaders are not yet fully involved in evaluating the quality of teaching well enough in their departments to identify where further improvements need to be made. As a result of this, they are not effecting change as rapidly as they could be. As a group, they have made a slow start in holding colleagues to account in their subject areas. In some areas middle leaders continue to have an overgenerous view of the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and pupils' outcomes. This is a barrier to these areas improving rapidly. While the quality of middle leadership is variable, some middle leaders are now in a better position to be able to make a difference. Support from senior leaders has been and will continue to be instrumental in developing their skills. This demonstrates how senior leaders are now holding this group of leaders to account and working with them to get to grips with the strengths and weaknesses of each subject area so that the rate of improvement gathers pace.

Improvements in the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are recent. There is now clear line management and more precise monitoring of pupils so that the deployment of support more accurately meets pupils' needs. However, leaders acknowledge that sufficient progress has not been made in this area. The attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities continues to be too low and their outcomes lag markedly behind the outcomes of other pupils. Those children who have education, health and care plans are not well served because the plans are not fit for purpose.

Governance arrangements are disparate at present, and since the previous inspection has suffered turbulence. There is no clear line of accountability between trustees and governors because there are no clear terms of reference or delegated responsibilities within the governing body as it currently stands. Therefore, roles and responsibilities at

the highest level are unclear. For example, basic aspects, such as the school's website, continue to not comply with statutory requirements. A number of policies, including for safeguarding, are out of date and do not meet the statutory requirements of governance. The governance review was completed in March 2018. It is a detailed review and provides clear recommendations for improvement. It also highlights some important issues around governance. For example, governors' lack of involvement in the strategic direction of the school, their lack of understanding of how pupil premium funding is spent or the effect of the spending. However, it must be noted that governors' passion for the school and for it to improve is ever present; this, alongside their knowledge of the school, provides a firm foundation for appropriate support and challenge.

The academy management committee (AMC) has recently been constructed. The AMC has a sharp eye on and understanding of the areas of the school that need urgent improvement. As such, reviews have been commissioned in different aspects, for example safeguarding and SEN and/or disabilities. As a result, the AMC is using its extensive skills and knowledge to support and challenge senior leaders with rigour so that the pace of change increases. Although the AMC does not hold any statutory authority, it continues to provide valuable advice and guidance to the acting headteacher and other leaders.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is an emerging strength. Leaders acknowledge that historic weaker teaching and inaccurate assessment practices have not been addressed quick enough or with sufficient rigour. Senior leaders' recent plans to monitor and quality assure teaching have the rigour necessary to address these issues. The effect of this, however, is limited at present.

During the inspection, the teaching sampled demonstrated that questioning remains weak. Teachers' questioning prompts and checks pupils' ideas; however, it does not develop, extend or in any way attempt to deepen their knowledge and understanding about ideas or concepts. As a result of this, pupils become passive and do not engage in their learning as much as they are capable of.

There are, undoubtedly, some effective teachers at Berwick Academy; however, there are still too many activities that are planned at a superficial level, rather than providing well-planned learning that is designed to engage, develop, and consolidate pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result, too many activities are pitched at a low level and do not challenge pupils enough, especially the most able and the most able disadvantaged.

Work in pupils' books is highly variable and inconsistent. Pupils' work since the previous inspection does not demonstrate how standards and expectations have risen. In some instances, pupils' progression and acquisition of knowledge and skills are superficial and there are few opportunities for pupils, in some subject areas, to explore concepts and ideas in any great depth. Pupils' application of skills is also

highly variable and underdeveloped, especially when it comes to pupils being given sufficient opportunities to practise writing at length and applying and developing literacy skills across other subjects.

There is evidence of weak assessment practice continuing across the school. As a result, misconceptions are not addressed quickly and therefore repeated, for example in mathematics and science. Some key words are continually misspelled by pupils and not checked, for example in English, and in some instances there are unchecked incorrect formation of verbs in modern foreign languages. While frequency of assessment has increased since the previous inspection, such actions are not checking pupils' knowledge, understanding or skills. Leaders acknowledge that they need to improve this area of the school's work, so it has a positive effect on pupils' learning and progress and gaps in knowledge dealt with. Some pupils' work, particularly boys, is too often unfinished and sloppily presented. For example, in mathematics, science and geography evidence shows that diagrams are regularly drawn in pen and without the use of a ruler.

In contrast, sixth-form work sampled would indicate that students are given opportunities to cover topics and concepts in detail and depth. Learning activities indicate an appropriate level of challenge and students show how they independently make extensive notes to support their learning. However, what is evident and similar is that assessment practices in this key stage of the school are also weak.

Overall, between the previous inspection and this monitoring visit, evidence would indicate that improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not been addressed with sufficient urgency or pace. As a result, pupils' rates of progress and levels of attainment have not improved and gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding remain.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

During the inspection, Year 9 benefited from various enrichment activities that focused on improving their aspirations for the future. Such activities were developing pupils' personal and social skills well. For some pupils, they were encouraged to think morally about environmental issues, for example plastic dumping in oceans. Pupils enjoyed this, especially the visit to the beach afterwards to help clean it up.

Pupils were, in the main, engaged in activities and showed an eagerness to develop their skills. This is, in part, down to the improved behaviour of pupils. Recently introduced systems to deal with incidents of poor behaviour have begun to have a positive impact on raising pupils' expectations of what is now expected of them. Pupils support the view that, in the main, behaviour of pupils has improved and less lessons are disrupted because of low-level disruption. However, concerns remain around the consistency of the application of the policy by staff. Leaders are resolute

to support staff and develop their skills further in dealing with any incidents of poor behaviour, appropriately and with consistency.

Attendance remains a major concern for school leaders. School information indicates that attendance is now the lowest it has been in the past three years. The absence rates of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities have also increased since the previous inspection. Persistent absence is far too high overall and for different pupil groups. Senior leaders acknowledge that they need to evaluate and revise strategies at a more urgent pace to significantly improve the attendance rates of pupils and groups of pupils. Notwithstanding, parents, carers and pupils need to continue their part in ensuring that attendance rates improve and pupils attend school as regularly as possible.

Outcomes for pupils

Senior leaders have recently introduced new systems and processes for assessing pupils across the school. The systems are well thought through and they are beginning to give leaders a more accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses in subject areas and between different groups of pupils. Leaders are using these systems to hold middle leaders and staff more readily and regularly to account for the performance of pupils. Despite these efforts, however, staff are not using this information consistently to inform their planning and meet the needs of pupils sufficiently.

Historically, and in some instances currently, pupils' outcomes remain a significant concern. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

The school's own assessment information indicates that current Year 11 pupils' outcomes will be worse than those of Year 11 in 2017. School assessment information and work in pupils' books indicates that underachievement is prevalent across a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics.

External support

The acting headteacher has secured external support from various sources. This has been particularly helpful in providing external reviews and support in identified areas, for example in safeguarding. The acting headteacher continues to welcome this support and challenge, in an attempt to raise standards in the school.