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Darren Glover
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Dear Mr Glover

Special measures monitoring inspection of Haydon Bridge Community High School and Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 October 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 March 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not 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 interim executive board (IEB), 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 March 2018.

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring that the IEB stringently holds leaders to account and provides the necessary strategic direction to improve teaching, learning and assessment and pupil outcomes, including in the sixth form
 - amending plans designed to improve the school so that unambiguous links exist between targets, actions, responsibilities and deadlines
 - making sure that leaders at all levels hold staff to account for their work
 - robustly monitoring all aspects of the school’s work with a focus on the impact of activities on outcomes for pupils
 - analysing the impact of the spending of additional funds to support disadvantaged pupils so that leaders have a thorough understanding of the strategies that work and those that do not
 - supporting middle leaders to ensure that they are effective in their roles
 - reviewing staff training to ensure consistency in the application of all school policies.
- Improve teaching so that progress rapidly improves for pupils in English, mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, by:
 - refining school assessment systems so that data is accurate and provides teachers with useful information about pupils’ attainment
 - improving the information teachers receive relating to all pupils, particularly those who have SEN and/or disabilities, so that they can plan to meet each pupil’s additional, and individual, needs
 - ensuring that support is introduced swiftly when a pupil is identified as underachieving
 - making sure that all teachers follow the school’s assessment policy
 - ensuring that teachers provide challenge and extend pupils’ learning from their different starting points
 - developing teachers’ use of questioning to enable them to assess pupils’ understanding accurately.
- Continue to improve pupils’ attendance and behaviour by:
 - decreasing persistent absenteeism further, particularly for pupils who are disadvantaged

- improving rates of attendance so that they are at least in line with the national average
- reducing the proportion of pupils who are excluded for a fixed term, especially boys.

External reviews of governance and of the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 16 October 2018 to 17 October 2018

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of staff. The inspector met with the chair of the IEB and two representatives from the local authority. A telephone call took place with the school improvement partner (SIP), who also completed the pupil premium review in May 2018. The inspector met formally with three groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in class. Observations of teaching and learning took place, including a work scrutiny focusing on pupil premium pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

The inspector looked at a range of documents including the local authority's statement of action, the school's action plan and self-evaluation document, record of pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievement, examples of leaders' monitoring activities and safeguarding documents. The inspector considered closely the progress the school has made towards the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been some notable changes in the school's staffing structure. Five members of staff left the school in the summer term and some teaching posts continue to be covered with supply staff, for example in physical education (PE), English and science. A new assistant headteacher, who is a mathematics specialist, will join the school in January 2019.

There is a newly formed senior leadership team with five new permanent appointments and one temporary, one-year, appointment. The local authority is providing different levels of leadership support. This includes a pastoral consultant, working with the school five days per week, and a leadership consultant, working with the school for two days per week, focusing on mathematics.

New governance arrangements are in place. The IEB in place at the time of the previous inspection has been disbanded and a new IEB is in place. This is now the key group holding leaders to account for the performance of the school and has been set up with the intention of adding further capacity, challenge and support.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, the pace for addressing the areas for improvement has not gathered enough momentum, particularly improvements in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The headteacher has worked hard to

improve leadership capacity by putting in place a senior leadership team, who are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The headteacher is candid and realistic about the issues that continue to hamper the school's progress towards the removal of special measures. Senior leaders are now working together collaboratively, and with those providing external support, so that the improvement journey of the school gathers pace. The headteacher, rightly, recognises that the school's action plan and pupil premium strategy plan both need refining so that there are clear milestones of improvement and success criteria, so that leaders at all levels can measure and evaluate the impact of their actions and be held accountable for their work. However, leaders' identified actions are appropriate.

At the most senior level in the school, there is a clarity of roles and responsibilities. As a result, sharper processes and systems are in place to hold staff to account. These are also enabling senior leaders to closely monitor aspects of the school's work that need it the most. Despite this, however, the impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and current pupils' outcomes, particularly disadvantaged pupils, remains fragile and in some instances weak.

While the headteacher has ensured that expectations at senior leadership level are clear, he also acknowledges that these have not had an impact on all staff and their classroom practice. Senior leaders have provided staff with new and refreshed opportunities to engage in professional development, such as how to plan learning to better meet pupils' needs. Staff say that they appreciate and enjoy engaging in the professional development opportunities offered since September 2018. However, the impact of training on improving some teachers' practice is limited.

Middle leadership is a concern. Despite the efforts of senior leaders and external support, some middle leaders remain unclear about how important their role is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas. As a result, they are not able to effect change and hold members of their team to account effectively. As a group, they are not contributing effectively to improving disadvantaged pupils' progress. Some are not aware of the barriers that face these pupils and have no clear strategies in place to combat the weak rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils in their subject areas. The headteacher, other senior leaders and the IEB acknowledge that this is hindering the pace of improvement. Nonetheless, they are determined to address this.

The newly appointed senior leader with strategic responsibility for SEN and/or disabilities and pupil premium has refined policies and systems, so that they are clear and identify pupils who have specific, additional needs correctly. Staff are now given relevant information, so that they can plan learning and deploy support to meet pupils' needs. Despite this, the information is not being used consistently well enough across the school to plan learning that meets pupils' needs. The pupil premium review has given staff practical advice and guidance. However, like other aspects, such information is not having enough impact on classroom practice to

improve the rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils. The IEB acknowledge that their next step is to be more involved with the strategic planning of how the pupil premium funding is spent and closely monitor the impact of the funding.

The newly formed IEB have worked swiftly to get to grips with the areas that need the most attention in the school. As a result, they are ensuring that there is an appropriate level of challenge and support for the headteacher and other members of the senior team. As a group, the IEB have a wide-ranging set of skills that put them on a firm ground, so that they can contribute to the strategic direction and improvement journey of the school. Members of the IEB, like the headteacher, are realistic and candid about those areas that need to build up pace. They are in a strong position to use their skills shrewdly to hold leaders, at all levels, to account and effect change.

The headteacher continues to appreciate the support and guidance being offered by the local authority. They are investing resources into the school, both strategically and financially, so that the school's pace of improvement can gather a faster pace, but also so that the quality of education on offer to pupils dramatically improves.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders responsible for teaching and learning and monitoring and evaluation, are beginning to build a view of the strengths and weaknesses across the school. They acknowledge, and are aware, where teaching continues to be weak and therefore impedes pupils' progress.

The use of questioning remains highly inconsistent. For example, in some areas of English, mathematics and science, questioning is not used well enough to develop or extend pupils' ideas or understanding, or to tackle pupils' misconceptions or misunderstandings. As a result, for some pupils, their knowledge gap widens and they miss out on valuable information related to a topic or concept.

There are still too many instances where teachers do not challenge pupils sufficiently in their learning. This is especially the case for the most able pupils. Therefore, there are high levels of variability as some activities are too easy, and some do not stretch pupils to think deeper. Where this is the case, pupils' prior learning is often not built upon effectively and, therefore, pupils do not achieve what they are capable of.

There are pockets of more effective practice evident in the school. In some classrooms, relationships are highly positive because expectations of what pupils can achieve are high, and pupils feel challenged in their learning. This is particularly the case in modern foreign languages (MFL), art, business studies and health and social care. However, such effective practice does not permeate the whole school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The efforts of the staff in the school to ensure that safeguarding policies are borne out in practice continue to be effective. Policies and procedures are well placed and managed with rigour. The current designated safeguarding lead has a measured approach so that all safeguarding incidents and child protection issues, should they arise, are dealt with quickly and effectively. Staff are aware of what process they need to follow should they have a concern. They also appreciate the weekly briefing, where they are provided with any appropriate information they may need to keep an eye on the most vulnerable in the school community.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection were helpful and respectful. Pupils were able to speak with confidence about how staff work to keep them safe. They particularly spoke about how, they feel, behaviour has improved at the school recently, as a result of a much clearer system in place for staff to deal with incidents of poor behaviour. However, they also stated that not all teachers are using the system consistently and that some learning continues to be disturbed because of a few pupils' poor attitudes. The headteacher and other senior leaders acknowledge this, and are working to address concerns.

Sixth-form students say that the advice and guidance they receive from the school about their learning, welfare and next steps is of high quality. They particularly made favourable comments about the quality of support and guidance they receive from sixth-form staff. They were also complimentary about the 'community spirit' within the sixth form and how they see themselves as role models for younger pupils in the school.

The attendance team are beginning to have a positive impact on reducing rates of absence, particularly throughout key stage 3. However, the high rates of absence of pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 are concerning. Persistent absenteeism also still remains too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The pastoral leader's analysis of pupils' attendance is detailed. However, leaders acknowledge that recent actions are in their infancy. Leaders are confident that, long term, the attendance of individual pupils who remain a concern will improve because of targeted, tailored actions. Such assertions will continue to be closely monitored in future visits.

The number of fixed-term exclusions, at this early point in the academic year, are already at a third of the total for the whole of last academic year. This is particularly concerning. Most of these exclusions are from Years 10 and 11, and a significant minority are pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional outcomes for pupils in Year 11 in 2018 indicate some improvements in pupils' progress in some subjects. However, the proportion of pupils attaining a standard pass in both English and mathematics declined. Pupils' progress in these

subjects was too slow. The attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils, in particular, remains a significant concern. The headteacher, the IEB and other senior leaders are under no illusion that there is a lot of work to do to secure better outcomes for pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, throughout the school.

For current pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, recently introduced strategies to improve their literacy and numeracy skills are beginning to have an impact. For example, reading ages have improved for some individual pupils. However, senior leaders need to ensure all staff buy into the strategies that are intended to have a demonstrable impact on pupils' outcomes and sustain long-term improvements.

Sixth-form outcomes improved in 2018 and the percentage of students that progressed to employment, education or training remains high. The retention of students between Years 12 to 13 also remains high.

External support

The local authority is providing consultant support for mathematics and to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance. This support is well targeted and is having some impact, but a number of strategies are in their infancy and it is too soon to evaluate their impact fully.

Working with the headteacher, a leadership consultant has successfully supported the realignment of senior leadership roles, bringing greater clarity to leaders' responsibilities.