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7 December 2018

Mr Jamie Henshaw  
Principal  
Newcastle Academy  
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Dear Mr Henshaw

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Newcastle Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 27 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in February 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders, governors of the local governing board, including the chair, the trust's chief executive officer (CEO) and a phone call conversation with the chair of the board of trustees. The lead inspector met with a group of pastoral and academic middle leaders. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement and action plans were evaluated. The lead inspector and the principal visited classrooms in English, mathematics and history in a learning walk, looked at pupils' books and work and sought pupils' views in discussions.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, you have taken up post as principal in April 2018. There has been significant staffing turbulence in both the senior leadership and the

main body of staff for a prolonged period of time. Since your appointment, you have brought stability to the school and made a number of key appointments. As a result, it is now fully staffed with specialist teachers in almost all learning areas. The chair of the local governing board (LGB) has stepped in following the resignation of the previous chair. Three new members of the LGB have been appointed to further strengthen its capacity.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

During your first term in post, you have brought about a sense of purpose and energy to the school. Since then, you have built on your knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, you know the school well and are focused on rapidly improving standards across the school. Other senior leaders are also making a positive contribution to the new direction. Staff, including middle leaders, are responding well to changes and are keen to improve their classroom practice. In recent months, the pace of improvement has picked up in the school and improvements are evident.

The trust's statement of action is used by leaders to prioritise actions in the summer and autumn terms. However, leaders' separate school improvement plan is a lengthy document that would benefit from sharper, more precise actions and outcome criteria for leaders and staff. You are aware of this and acknowledge that the improvement plan would benefit from being redrafted to continue to focus on the most urgent improvement strategies first.

The trust, especially the CEO, has provided strong leadership support, which has guided the school through a period of transition and staffing issues. She worked in partnership on recruitment, commissioned a review of the pupil premium funding and continues to provide challenge and mentorship to you and your colleagues. This provided a stimulus to bring about improvements to the governing body, including the temporary appointment of a chair of governors and additional member of the LGB.

The CEO, through extensive monitoring of the school's improvement work, has a very clear and sharp understanding of the school's strengths and remaining weaknesses. She completes regular monitoring of the quality of teaching, analysis of assessment information and scrutiny of attendance information. Furthermore, she has brokered a range of support from other schools within the trust. As a result, middle leaders now routinely moderate work, share best practice and have regular meetings to ensure validity of information gathered. This work is effective in bringing about improvements in key aspects, such as the quality of teaching and leadership and management.

You and your leaders were proactive in your response to tackling the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. A new minimum expectation for teaching was introduced to improve the quality of teaching, highlighting seven

effective teaching and learning principles. A new and improved cycle for checking the effectiveness of teaching was introduced, and staff are now involved in meetings to discuss the progress that their pupils are making. You and your leadership team have further developed the monitoring during this autumn term. Feedback given to staff is precise and is helping to develop the quality of teaching.

You have implemented a new system for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. While this is in the early stages of use, it is already improving teachers' understanding of how to plan effective lessons using assessment information. However, this work has not had time to be fully embedded, so some variability in planning still remains.

A pupil premium review was carried out in the week prior to this visit. This review has highlighted some of the improvements made and gives you a clear vision of how the premium could be better targeted and measured for impact. This has been translated into the pupil premium plan for this academic year. The plan is detailed and focuses sharply on strategies to improve the outcomes of pupils for whom the funding is intended.

Teaching is improving since the previous inspection because staff are working productively together to refine their practice and share best practice. They have responded well to training and the expectations that you shared at the start of the year. Classroom environments are calm and conducive to learning. Teachers requiring more intensive support have taken on board advice and, as a result, have made improvements to their teaching. Other teachers have decided to leave the school.

While teaching has improved, there are still some aspects of classroom practice that are not as good as they could be. Teachers' questioning is improving, but is not yet strong. Sometimes, pupils are not challenged to, or given enough time to, explain their answer with appropriate depth. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.

Some teachers do not routinely ensure that pupils' literacy skills are sufficiently well developed. When this happens, spelling mistakes become errors over time. Pupils' work showed examples of grammar, punctuation and spelling errors over time, especially in English, where they remained uncorrected. You are aware of this and have plans in place to address any remaining inconsistencies.

Due to the improvements in teaching, pupils' progress is beginning to improve this year. When compared to the school's historical end of key stage 4 performances, the assessment information shared and work seen in pupils' books during the visit demonstrate that progress and attainment are improving, albeit from a very low base.

You have put in place new arrangements for the management and monitoring of

pupils' attendance. Attendance staff now deploy a range of very effective strategies to ensure that pupils who are absent from school are checked on and brought into school whenever possible. There is now a better analysis of absence rates, including persistent absence. This work has been newly introduced. However, overall attendance and persistent absence rates are still not improving sharply enough. This year's attendance figures have been negatively affected by 28 families deciding to take their children on holidays during school time in the autumn term.

Although most pupils spoken to during the visit believe that the school is improving, some pupils, especially in key stage 4, feel undervalued and disheartened. This is because they have had the longest time at the school during a period of great instability, weak teaching and high staff turnover. You acknowledge this and said that you would take more opportunities to reassure pupils.

In order to address the issues identified in this visit, governors and leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that the school's literacy policy is reviewed for its effectiveness on improving pupils' literacy skills.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement and action plans are fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bianka Zemke  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**