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Mr Darren Glover
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Glover

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

Following my visit with Angela White, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 June 2019, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2018. 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.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may 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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 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 SEND, 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 second monitoring inspection on 5 June 2019 to 6 June 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching across a range of subjects and year groups, some jointly with leaders. A number of pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form were involved in public examinations during the visit. Inspectors scrutinised documents, including the school's action plan, self-evaluation document, pupil premium strategy plan and written reports that evaluate the school's actions to date. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and documents relating to behaviour, exclusions, attendance, teaching and learning, and current pupils' assessment information. Inspectors also carried out a review of pupils' books from a range of abilities and subjects. Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, a group of staff and four groups of pupils. Inspectors met with representatives from the school's IEB and the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in October 2018, a new senior leader has joined the school and the middle tier of leadership has been restructured. Five members of staff have left since the previous monitoring visit and two more staff will leave at the end of the summer term. Four new staff will begin at the school in September 2019 in physical education (PE), modern foreign languages (MFL), information technology (IT) and music. A new leader will join the school in September 2019 on secondment from a local secondary school for a two-year fixed period. The school is fully staffed for September 2019.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring visit, the headteacher, the IEB and the senior leadership team have continued with unwavering candour and resolute determination to improve standards. As a result, the rate of improvement is gathering momentum and standards are improving at a much-needed faster pace. Senior leaders are collectively ensuring that strategies implemented to improve, for example, the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and attendance are bearing fruit. Consequently, there are clear signs of improvement since the previous monitoring visit.

The headteacher has proactively strengthened the school's self-evaluation document and action plan. As a result of his actions, senior leaders are in a stronger position to continually evaluate the impact of their work. Senior leaders have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. For example, the school's action plan and pupil premium strategy both set clear milestones and success criteria to benchmark improvements. This is allowing a more focused and measurable approach so that leaders can both be held accountable for their work and measure the success of their actions. Consequently, the headteacher and senior

leaders are in a prime position to fully grasp what is and what is not working and adapt accordingly. Nonetheless, senior leaders need to ensure that their evaluations are precise and linked to the quality information they gather through various monitoring activities.

Senior leader collaboration is bringing about a more strategic approach so that the quality of teaching improves across the school. For example, the joined-up thinking of the senior leaders with responsibility for teaching and learning and monitoring and evaluation, since the previous monitoring visit, has paid off, as clear signs of improvement in the quality of teaching are now evident. These senior leaders are realistic and understand that the journey to consistency will take time as systems and processes embed. Nonetheless, current systems and processes now in place are allowing staff to be more regularly held to account. Staff appreciate the transparency in the process and appreciate the support they receive from leaders to improve their practice.

The effectiveness of middle leadership is showing signs of recovery. At the time of the previous monitoring visit, middle leadership was identified as a concern. However, the restructuring of this important tier of leadership is paying off as the newly formed faculty leaders take the frontline to bring about change and improvements in the subjects they lead. There is greater clarity and understanding among middle leaders regarding their roles and responsibilities. Consequently, middle leadership is steadily strengthening and supporting senior leaders in their work to gain greater consistency and driving up expectations of what pupils can and should be achieving. As a group, middle leaders are ambitious for the teams they lead. However, they acknowledge that there is limited impact in their work due to the short period of time they have been in post.

The senior leader with responsibility for pupils with SEND and pupil premium continues to effectively implement systems so that pupils who are underachieving are identified swiftly. As a result, support for current pupils has enabled them to demonstrate an increase in their knowledge, understanding and skills. There is a clear understanding of the barriers vulnerable pupils face and there is a well-thought-out plan to address these barriers. While staff have accessed various professional development opportunities to support their planning so that pupils' needs are met, leaders acknowledge that planning remains inconsistent and, as a result, outcomes within and across subjects remain inconsistent and variable for some disadvantaged pupils and some pupils with SEND.

The IEB has established clear lines of accountability. Therefore, leaders at all levels and staff are being held to account regularly through thorough and detailed monitoring systems and processes. The IEB is highly skilled and experienced. Members of the IEB receive valuable information from senior leaders. As a result, they are aware of the emerging strengths that exist in the school. However, they are sharply aware of those areas that need to improve and those that need to demonstrate long-term, sustainable improvements.

It must be noted that leaders share an absolute commitment to driving up standards and to the headteacher's vision of being a school where all pupils can achieve success and be prepared for life in modern Britain. Professional development opportunities and support for staff have been plentiful. As a result, at this time I am satisfied that the school has the capacity to support newly qualified teachers coming into the profession.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is showing clear signs of improvement. Senior leaders' fastidious monitoring of teaching and well-thought-out, bespoke professional development opportunities have benefited staff and contributed to eradicating the inadequate teaching that existed in the school. Leaders have planned appropriate and timely support for identified staff to improve their teaching practice. Consequently, senior leaders now focus on further improving the quality and consistency of teaching, so that it will ultimately have a positive effect on pupils' outcomes.

In the vast majority of classrooms, there are positive atmospheres that are conducive to learning. Teachers' planning is becoming increasingly effective. As a result, they plan activities that engage pupils and aim to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Despite this improvement, teachers do not consistently sequence learning so that pupils can progressively extend, consolidate and/or deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. Consequently, pupils' needs are not always met, and they are not challenged to think beyond a superficial level.

Teachers' skills in questioning are developing. This is because they have accessed professional development opportunities focusing on this area and it has been given a high priority for development. The quality of teachers' questioning varies across the school. For example, some teachers move about, checking pupils' understanding and tackling misconceptions quickly, whereas a number do not use questioning to extend pupils' ideas or understanding of concepts and, therefore, accept simple responses from pupils without probing further or taking into account their prior learning.

Pupils spoken to during the visit agreed that teaching is improving. They explained to inspectors that, typically, teachers now expect more from them. Nonetheless, they were also quick to explain that some teachers do not challenge them and do not have as high expectations of them as others do. In some instances, expectations of what pupils can achieve remain too low.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' attitudes to learning continue to show improvement as they grow in confidence to share ideas and involve themselves in their learning. Pupils are respectful and polite. As a result, the school is a calm and orderly place. However, this can sometimes be let down by a significant minority who are hesitant to follow expectations.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection were pleasant and happy to share their understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example when using social media. Pupils reported that bullying is rare, but if it did occur they were confident it would be dealt with by a member of staff quickly. Pupils are respectful and tolerant. They articulate well how everybody is equal and how difference should be celebrated.

Students in the sixth form spoke highly of the different opportunities they are given to demonstrate their leadership skills, for example when organising charity or sporting events. However, to further enhance students' experiences in this important phase of the school, leaders recognise that a structured, age-appropriate, personal, social and health education programme would benefit students further for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Pupils in Year 11 have a sound understanding of the various options available to them when they leave school. However, in other year groups, it is highly variable. Leaders acknowledge that they need to initiate a coherent plan, so that all pupils access a high-quality careers information, advice and guidance programme.

In the main, it is evident that behaviour has improved. This is despite the fact that, over time, the proportion of pupils who have been excluded for a fixed-term period has been slightly above the national average, and at the time of the previous monitoring visit, fixed-term exclusions had risen to a concerning level. Currently, evidence would indicate that there has been a marked reduction in the proportion of pupils who have been excluded for a fixed-term period. This is especially true for boys and disadvantaged pupils. However, the proportion of girls who have received a fixed-term exclusion has risen this year in comparison to this time last year.

Pupils' attendance over recent years has not been good enough. Historically, pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, have not attended as regularly as they could and should have. In relation to current pupils, the attendance team continues to have a positive effect on reducing rates of absence. There are clear systems and processes now in place and a clarity in roles and responsibilities regarding absence procedures. As a result, attendance has improved since the previous monitoring visit and persistent absence has declined. However, disadvantaged pupils are still likely to be absent more than other pupils in the school. Likewise, students' attendance in the sixth form is not good enough. Parents and carers must continue to play their part in supporting the school by ensuring that their children attend as regularly as they should.

Outcomes for pupils

From their significantly below-average starting points, Year 11 pupils' outcomes in 2018 demonstrated improvement overall, in relation to both their progress and the grades pupils attained. In science, pupils continued to achieve well. However, disadvantaged pupils significantly underachieved. This was also the case for boys, who achieved far less well than girls. Despite some evident improvements, the

headteacher, the IEB and other senior leaders continue to be resolute in their work to secure better outcomes for pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, boys and those identified as needing additional SEND support.

In relation to current pupils, while improvements are evident in pupils' books and from observations of teaching, there remain inconsistencies across subjects and for particular groups of pupils. Despite the inconsistencies, there is evidence of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills improving, for example in mathematics. Currently, pupils are making better progress in English than in mathematics, but new leadership and support in mathematics are bringing about steady improvements.

Leaders closely monitor the information they have about current pupils' progress and, where necessary, plan appropriate interventions for pupils to access. This is giving identified pupils the opportunity to fill gaps in their knowledge because of historical weaker teaching.

External support

The local authority continues to provide consultant support to the school. The support packages that the school has accessed are well targeted and having a positive impact, for example around behaviour and attendance. The local authority has recently contributed a considerable financial investment in the school to improve the buildings and provide new facilities for pupils to access in the future.