

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 December 2019

Mr Terence Conway
Headteacher
Norham High School
Alnwick Avenue
North Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE29 7BU

Dear Mr Conway

Special measures monitoring inspection of Norham High School

Following my visit to your school on 3 to 4 December 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 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 October 2018.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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 governing body, 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

Lee Elliott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve, urgently, the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that pupils make better progress by:
 - making sure that there is a focus on the progress of all pupils from their different starting points, particularly disadvantaged pupils
 - having an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning
 - improving the effectiveness of training so that it directly affects the quality of teaching and learning
 - improving the systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning so that there is a consistent approach across the school
 - making sure that middle leaders are supported in improving their skills, so that they can accurately evaluate the quality of teaching in their areas and identify, with accuracy, areas for improvement
 - ensuring that all staff follow school policies
 - providing appropriate information about pupils' progress and the standard of teaching and learning to governors, so that they can hold leaders rigorously to account.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by making sure that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - teachers use information about pupils' starting points to set work which challenges and motivates pupils
 - pupils understand what it is that they are learning and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - strengthening their understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism
 - ensuring that all staff are consistent in their use of the school's behaviour policy
 - ensuring that all staff consistently follow leaders' policies for corridor presence and the management of pupils' behaviour between lessons
 - improving pupils' attitudes to learning.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 3 to 4 December 2019

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the newly appointed headteacher and deputy headteacher. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with subject leaders, leaders with responsibility for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), teachers, support staff and two representatives from the local authority. I spoke on the telephone with one provider of alternative education provision. I spoke to groups of pupils formally and other pupils in lessons. I listened to a presentation from pupil leaders and conducted joint lesson visits across the school with the headteacher and assistant headteacher. I met with the leader of English and, together, we evaluated pupils' workbooks and learning. During this inspection, I focused specifically on pupils' behaviour and attitudes, the quality of education and leadership and management.

Context

The school has been subject to an academy order since May 2016. Attempts to find a suitable sponsor have been unsuccessful. This was the first monitoring visit since the school's section 5 inspection in October 2018. Since the inspection, a new headteacher, deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher have been appointed. All three took up post in September 2019. The previous executive headteacher and acting head of school have returned to their substantive posts. School leaders have appointed two lead practitioners with responsibility for the quality of education pupils receive. Subject leaders of humanities and English have also been appointed this academic year. Following a skills audit, three new governors have joined the governing body.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

The quality of education which pupils receive is improving. Teachers say the guidance and training they receive is much clearer than it used to be. This is helping to improve consistency in the classroom. Teachers follow an agreed lesson structure when planning lessons. Pupils are now given more opportunities to discuss their opinions, contribute ideas and review their learning. Some teachers ask effective questions in the classroom, allowing them to probe pupils' understanding and assess how well pupils are remembering new information. Leaders know that further improvements are needed to ensure that more teachers follow effectively the school's chosen approach to lesson planning and teaching.

Senior and subject leaders have started to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. However, it is still early days in this regard. Currently, subject leaders have not considered sufficiently well the most important subject content in the

curriculum. Consequently, schemes of work do not ensure that pupils revisit important knowledge and skills over time. When pupils begin to learn new content, they are not well prepared, because, for some, they are unable to remember work they covered in the past or their prior learning did not prepare them well enough to learn new and more difficult concepts. Currently, pupils 'drop' a number of subjects at the end of Year 8. Additionally, Year 11 pupils do not study religious education (RE) or complete fully the programmes of study in this subject. In this way, the curriculum is not sufficiently broad and balanced for as long as possible. Pupils leave school with some significant gaps in their understanding. Leaders know this and intend to review the design of the curriculum before the end of this academic year.

At the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour was very poor. Pupils and staff are consistent in their view that this is not the case anymore. There is some secure inspection evidence which confirms that pupils' behaviour is much better than it used to be. During the inspection, pupils were polite and eager to say 'hello'. They held open doors and moved sensibly around the well-supervised corridors and school building. There is little bullying in the school. If bullying does occur, pupils say staff take it very seriously and deal with it swiftly. Leaders have changed the way staff issue rewards and sanctions. Pupils say more staff are 'out and about', monitoring lessons and taking an interest in how they are doing. Staff and pupils say relationships between them are far more positive than they used to be. Pupils say staff now see the best in them. Pupils appreciate the many rewards on offer for positive attitudes to learning and the opportunity to have a say in the running of their school via the new school council and form representatives. Pupils recognise that some teachers are more 'strict' than others and/or do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. Although not witnessed during this inspection, pupils and staff say low-level disruption still occurs in some lessons. Furthermore, while improving considerably, pupils and staff say most behaviour sanctions result from issues related to homework and not pupils' inappropriate behaviour.

The number of days lost due to fixed-period exclusions is similar to what it used to be. However, fewer pupils are being excluded. Boys continue to account for most fixed-period exclusions. Leaders believe that the revised behaviour policy and increased expectations regarding pupils' behaviour are, in-part, contributing to exclusion figures remaining broadly similar. It is clear to see that leaders and governors do not exclude pupils lightly. They work successfully with a wide range of alternative education providers to offer pupils and staff respite when behaviour needs to improve. The vast majority of pupils who are placed on 'turnaround' placements elsewhere return to school having received effective support to modify their behaviour in the future.

Leaders have appointed a full-time attendance mentor to complement the work of the school's own education welfare officer. Rates of attendance have improved slightly since the previous inspection. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Persistent absence, while improving, continues to be above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils are absent from school more often than

other pupils nationally.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

New senior leaders have brought to the school a renewed sense of purpose. Staff morale is strong and improving. This has been helped by leaders' clarity and determination to succeed. Staff say their opinions are valued and they have the resources to be more effective in their roles. One member of staff commented that, 'it feels like our heart is beating again' when describing the collective determination of staff to improve the school.

The school's action plan is well considered. It links closely with the school's appraisal process. Leaders' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses is strong and improving. This is helping to ensure that governors are presented with information that is more accurate than it has been. Governors are asking challenging questions of leaders. Governors have used the findings from the external review of governance to create their own action plan. The plan is reviewed regularly, in the same way as the school's action plan. However, governors appreciate that to be more effective in their roles, they need further training linked to the school's curriculum and the effect it has on pupils' education.

Staff who are new to the profession and were newly qualified at the time of the last inspection say they have been supported effectively in the early stages of their career. A new assistant headteacher now leads on staff training and development. The capacity for further improvement in this area has strengthened.

Leadership of the additionally resourced provision (ARP) and SEND are strong. Leaders with responsibility for SEND have a very clear understanding of the barriers to learning some pupils face. Additionally, leaders have recently revised the curriculum for pupils with SEND in the ARP. Every third week, during 'friendly Fridays', pupils with SEND learn outside the classroom with their teachers and support staff. Pupils visit places such as the airport and shopping centres. Alternatively, pupils learn to cook and clean. This helps to develop pupils' independent and social skills. Parents really appreciate this new initiative. Some report that they can see a big improvement in their children's confidence in a short space of time.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of education which pupils receive is improving. Leaders' expectations of teachers and pupils are more explicit. This is helping to ensure that staff follow the school's agreed structure when planning lessons. Teachers ask more from their pupils now. Most pupils are responding well to teachers' questioning.
- Staff morale is high. Staff say that, more recently, they feel valued and supported to do their job effectively. There is a real determination to do what is right for all

pupils.

- Pupils' behaviour is considerably better than it was. Pupils say relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is calm. Pupils are well-supervised and move between lessons swiftly and sensibly.
- Rates of attendance are improving. Leadership capacity has increased in this area. This is helping to ensure that pupils and families receive support when needed. Pupils with previously low rates of attendance are starting to come to school more often.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Over time, the school's curriculum has not led to pupils achieving well. There are some considerable gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding still. New leaders have started to evaluate the curriculum. However, they are at the very early stages of this process. Currently, subject schemes of work are not sequenced appropriately so that pupils experience lessons which connect well, improve their knowledge, skills and understanding and/or address gaps in pupils' learning.
- The school's curriculum is not sufficiently broad and balanced for as long as possible. At key stages 3 and 4, some pupils 'drop' some subjects and do not get the chance to continue others, such as RE. This, and pupils' low starting points when they arrive at school in Year 7, mean that some pupils leave school having not secured an appropriately diverse and well-rounded education.
- While improving, the quality of education which pupils receive varies across the school. Some teachers are less effective when planning to meet the needs of pupils from their different starting points or when implementing the school's new behaviour policies.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school remains above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils continue to be absent from school more often than other pupils nationally.

External support

Leaders and staff have been supported by a number of experienced staff and leaders from other local schools. For example, two national leaders of education (NLE's) previously led the school temporarily or supported senior staff to review the effectiveness of their work. Specialist leaders of education (SLE's) in all subjects have worked with staff to identify strengths and weaknesses across the school. Staff say this 'critical friend' approach has played an integral part in helping them to develop their own understanding of examination specifications and curriculum effectiveness.

The local authority has been proactive. It has supported the school financially and ensured that staff and leaders are involved fully in achievement meetings and activities designed to measure the effectiveness of school improvement strategies. Furthermore, the local authority has brokered additional external support for new school leaders so that they have a 'buddy' in other similar schools to share ideas or get an opinion when needed. Leaders and governors are fulsome in their praise for the support they have received since October 2018.