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20 July 2023

Martin Lonergan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lonergan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Northern Counties School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 20 June 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer of The Percy Hedley Foundation, the school improvement partner, other staff, trustees and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also considered leaders' actions to improve the curriculum, ongoing improvements to the school's environment, visited lessons, held meetings with other staff, met a range of pupils both informally and formally and completed a document scrutiny. I reviewed the comments made by parents on Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and responses to the staff survey. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Northern Counties School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous monitoring inspection, you have been appointed as the headteacher of the school. Governance of the school has been strengthened further with the appointments of three additional governors. Two of the additional governors bring valuable leadership experience from other schools. Governors are much better placed to challenge your development plans across a range of school improvement priorities. You have recruited two teachers. This ensures that there are no vacant teaching positions for the new academic year. You and your team have developed plans to cover planned maternity leave.

You and your team have rightly focused on implementing a newly developed curriculum. The curriculum has been created to meet the specific needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You have organised the curriculum into learning pathways. They are pre-formal, informal, semi-formal and formal pathways. The formal pathway is mostly aligned to the ambitions of the national curriculum. The pre-formal pathway follows the engagement model. This is an assessment tool for pupils who are working below the level of the national curriculum and not engaged in subject-specific study. Within this pathway structure, you and your team ensure that teachers make curriculum adaptations to meet the individual learning needs of pupils.

You and your team continue to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum while it is being embedded. Your quality assurance checks have led to further development of the detail for what pupils learn and how it is to be delivered. The curriculum improvements can be seen in lessons across the school. Your developments have improved consistency in teaching and increased your ability to monitor curriculum implementation effectively. There has been a positive impact on teachers' workloads. This is supported by their responses to the inspection staff survey. The quality of education that pupils receive continues to improve.

You receive a range of support and advice from different people and stakeholders. You value the support of a school improvement partner. These people bring an external perspective that ensures that your school improvement plans remain focused. You are well supported by committed trustees and governors. They are supporting you effectively to lay the groundwork for the future of the school. They endorse your improvements to the curriculum and prioritisation of reading. They continue to invest in the school and believe that it can add value to the community. This includes sharing successful SEND practice with other schools. Your safeguarding systems and processes continue to strengthen. You have improved the sophistication around contractor checks to ensure that they are swift, for example. With the support of leaders from the Percy Hedley Foundation, you continue to work sensitively to resolve inspectors' questions about adults that reside on site.

You provide calm leadership to your team. You are focused on rapidly improving the school. Your development plans clearly identify the range of improvements that are needed in response to the graded inspection and subsequent monitoring visits. You are

rightly prioritising those areas of school improvement that will have the greatest impact on pupils. Your focus on supporting staff to develop their skills is notable. Staff appreciate the care and consideration that you show them. Sufficient progress has been made.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of The Percy Hedley Foundation, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

David Mills
His Majesty's Inspector