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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Ruston Atkinson
Principal
NCEA Duke's Secondary School
Academy Road
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 9FZ

Dear Mr Atkinson

Monitoring inspection of a school not in a category of concern of NCEA Duke's Secondary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 13 November 2024, 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 took place because the school meets the monitoring threshold as set out in the [Monitoring Inspection Handbook](#).

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, 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 met with several members of staff, including subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, met with a group of pupils and looked at documents relating to the school's use of alternative provision and school improvement. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but some aspects of the school need further improvement.

The school should take further action to:

- provide additional training for staff on the most prevalent areas of need for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that they can identify and meet pupils' needs consistently well
- embed the new quality assurance processes in school so that leaders can quickly identify and address any inconsistencies in delivering the curriculum
- embed the new behaviour policy as part of your work to reduce suspensions and support pupils to learn the curriculum consistently well.

Main findings

In September 2023 you appointed an additional deputy principal to have oversight of pupils' behaviour. You have carefully considered how to bring about improvement. You have worked on improving the use of data, policy and systems for monitoring and managing behaviour. This is to reduce permanent exclusions and suspensions and ensure that more pupils benefit more consistently from the school's curriculum.

Since the previous inspection, you have made improvements to the quality of education. There has been a focus on improving pupils' vocabulary to support their reading and literacy skills. The curriculum now includes plans for the explicit teaching of subject-specific vocabulary. This has been done to support pupils to know, remember and apply the vocabulary they have been taught.

The school has also developed its support for weaker readers. There is a programme of intervention to support pupils at the earliest stages of learning to read. This includes decoding and reading comprehension. This support is having a positive impact on those pupils who access it. Following recent training, you intend to further develop the support to include helping pupils with their reading fluency. You understand the next stage of this work is ensuring that there are enough teachers trained to deliver the support to all pupils who need it in a timely way.

You have a firm vision, based on educational research, for how the curriculum teachers should deliver the curriculum. Teachers receive clear guidance and regular training on the guiding principles for how to do this. This includes effective ways to adapt the curriculum to support all pupils, including those with SEND. Staff clearly understand these expectations. However, staff have not received specific training on identifying and meeting the most prevalent needs of pupils at the school, for example social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. This means that staff are not consistently knowledgeable about SEMH needs or skilled at adapting the curriculum to meet these pupils' specific needs.

You have recognised the need to ensure that there is greater consistency in delivering the curriculum. The school has developed its quality assurance processes to include 'drop-ins'. These are strategically planned lesson visits so that leaders can evaluate the curriculum.

You intend this work to highlight where there are strengths and inconsistencies in how teachers deliver the curriculum. It is your intention to use this information to support teachers and departments when you identify inconsistencies. This approach to quality assurance is in its infancy. The school recognises the need to embed this system before it has a sustained impact on pupils and the quality of education they receive.

The school has also developed its systems for monitoring the use of alternative provision. You continue to ensure that any alternative provision that pupils access is appropriate to pupils' needs. You now hold detailed records about the curriculum that pupils follow and the progress they are making. Leaders are aware of the need to monitor more closely that the alternative provision that pupils with an education, health and care plan access is meeting their needs.

Governors and trustees are committed to ensuring that the school provides pupils with a high-quality education. Trustees have adapted their way of working to include link trustees who attend local governing body meetings. This has improved communication and provided trustees with assurances that they are sufficiently challenging leaders as well as supported you in your work to improve the quality of education that pupils receive.

To improve pupils' behaviour, the school now uses more robust data to track carefully any behaviour incidents that occur. Leaders regularly analyse the data to identify patterns and trends so that they can put in place appropriate support. For example, the school has developed an 'on-call' system, where leaders now proactively support areas of the school where the data shows a trend in behaviour incidents. This has reduced the number of significant incidents in these areas.

Since analysing the data more closely, you have recognised the need to amend the policy for managing behaviour so that fewer pupils receive suspensions. Changes to the policy show a clear, tiered approach to managing incidents. The new policy places a greater emphasis on restoring relationships between pupils and staff after incidents occur. As a new policy, it is too soon to measure the impact it is having. Staff find the new policy supportive. Some pupils say they remain a little confused by the changes. The school is aware of the need to embed the new policy, providing ongoing support for pupils to understand the changes and training for staff to ensure they are implementing the policy consistently.

The school continues to work hard to ensure pupils attend school regularly. Leaders recognise the need to try new ways to support pupils whose attendance is a concern. The school has taken a more individualised approach for some pupils, which is beginning to have a positive impact. You aim to broaden this approach so that more pupils benefit from individualised support for attendance.

The school commissioned an external review of the science curriculum from a local teaching school hub. This identified the need for more robust quality assurance processes, which leaders have begun to address across the school. Separate to this, the school has

also commissioned the services of an additional school improvement advisor from the diocese. This work is scheduled to begin from January 2025.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust (NCEAT), the director of education for the Diocese of Newcastle, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Dan McKeating
His Majesty's Inspector