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9 October 2008

Mr Denis Fay  
Acting Headteacher  
Ulverston Victoria High School  
Springfield Road  
Ulverston  
Cumbria  
LA12 0EB

Dear Mr Fay

Special Measures: monitoring inspection of Ulverston Victoria High School

Following my visit with Gill Jones HMI and Peter McKay, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7-8 October 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed only with the agreement of the lead inspector.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria LA.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## Special Measures: monitoring of Ulverston Victoria High School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2008,

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents provided by the school and met with the acting headteacher, groups of staff, including those with leadership responsibilities, the headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

A substantive headteacher has not yet been appointed. Consequently, arrangements have been made for the acting headteacher to continue until the end of the current academic year.

Since the last monitoring inspection a co-ordinator for teaching and learning has been appointed and joined the senior leadership team.

### Achievement and standards

The school has had a good degree of success in overcoming underachievement and, in all three key stages, standards have risen and students' progress in relation to their starting points and capability has improved.

The school's assessments of students' standards by the end of Year 9 show increases in both the proportions of students reaching the level expected for their age and those exceeding that standard.

The 2008 GCSE results were higher than the previous year. The rise in the percentage of students who obtained five good grades that included English and mathematics was particularly marked. This shows that, for last year's leavers, their rate of progress stepped up considerably in Year 11.

Standards and achievement have improved in the sixth form and, in 2008, there was a significant increase in the number of passes at the higher grades.

The improvement in standards has been aided by two factors in particular. Firstly, study leave for older students was replaced by time in school. Secondly, additional support was provided for 'borderline' students, those at risk of falling just short of good grades.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve achievement and raise standards across the school – good

## Personal development and well-being

Students are usually well-behaved. They have positive attitudes to learning and they value the feedback they receive on their work through the 'yellow sticker' marking system which has been introduced throughout the school. That said, in lessons, the degree to which students rise to challenge, enjoy exploring ideas, and show a drive to succeed varies in direct relationship to the quality of teaching.

Much is being done to improve attendance and, as a result, fewer students have very poor attendance records. The number of exclusions has continued to fall.

## Quality of provision

The school has done a lot to lift the quality of teaching and has well conceived plans to continue doing so. The appointment of a member of staff, at senior leadership level, to co-ordinate and lead the drive to improve teaching and the reinvigoration of the 'teaching and learning group' are positive steps that have the potential to improve teaching further and to enthuse staff about honing their teaching skills.

The common weaker elements in teaching have been tackled well while keeping teachers' morale up. The school has laid on additional training, often drawing on support staff from the LA, but increasingly using in-house expertise. For instance, training is lined up on the use of assessment for learning; this is to be led by the school's own staff. The impact of the school's efforts is evident in greater consistency in lesson planning; a stronger focus on progression from lesson to lesson; more variety of learning activities in each lesson; and work that is generally pitched to provide adequate challenge for most students in the class. Marking has also improved. The 'yellow sticker' system is used by all teachers, not equally well, but with examples of outstanding practice. This new system ensures that students receive regular feedback on their achievement and are set short-term goals for progress. This is motivating for students who value the feedback and are aware that their progress is kept under review.

For a number of teachers, the quality of their lessons has moved up a gear and is now mostly good. Senior staff know that a small proportion of the teaching is not of a consistently satisfactory quality. They are now targeting and tailoring support to overcome this. A general area for development is the match of work to the varied needs of students in a class or set. There are examples where teachers manage such differentiation very well and groups of students tackle work on the same theme but at different levels of challenge. This means that all are pushed on in their learning. More often, however, teachers expect the more able students to produce better work but do not set harder tasks for them. Equally, those who find learning difficult are helped but not always set simpler work.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching – good

- Ensure safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements – this issue was resolved at the first monitoring inspection

## Leadership and management

The early signs of change for the better, which were noted at the previous monitoring inspection, have been built on successfully. The acting headteacher has made a major contribution to speeding up the rate of improvement. He has brought a strategic vision for improvement and given a clear sense of purpose and direction. Staff, students, governors, parents and members of the local community recognise the difference he has made to the school. He has raised expectations, set standards, for instance for the wearing of school uniform, introduced school-wide systems and procedures and established lines of accountability. Consequently people know where they stand, they recognise that things need to improve and they are pulling together.

The senior leadership team is with the acting headteacher. Its members have clearly defined areas of responsibility and they, in turn, make expectations clear to middle managers, pastoral staff and teachers. So, for example, form tutors know how their responsibility for checking and supporting students' progress links into the work of subject leaders. Members of the senior team work supportively with groups of subject leaders to develop their capacity to undertake these middle management roles. Even so, the capacity and level of skill in subject leadership varies considerably and this is reflected in the quality of planning for improvement at subject and department level and some disparities in students' progress between subjects.

The use of assessment data to keep track of students' progress and to inform decisions about interventions, both to tackle underachievement by students and to support staff, has improved considerably. A clear assessment calendar has recently been introduced. This underpins the more effective use of assessment data. It means that staff know what assessments are to be undertaken when. Furthermore, senior staff have much timely information on which to base evaluations of the effectiveness of the school's provision and to influence their regular discussions with subject leaders. The accuracy of teachers' assessments of the standards of students' work has improved as a result of training. Nevertheless, such assessments are not fully secure across all subjects and year groups. There are examples of staff making good use of information from assessments to support planning for a close match of work to students' needs in class lessons. However, this is not yet the norm.

The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has limited impact on its overall effectiveness. Mathematics is more in evidence. There are good standards in the subject. The department's staff are set to contribute to in-house training to improve teachers' skills in using assessment to promote learning. The subject leader's influence has been strengthened by her inclusion in the extended senior team. The contribution of computing is much less. The school has made some improvements to provision in information and communication technology (ICT) but there is still a shortage of facilities and equipment and ICT is not used as an integral

part of teaching and learning across subjects. Take up of ICT and computing courses is not high.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels set clear and agreed priorities, monitor their implementation and evaluate their impact – good
- Ensure that assessment data is effectively used to identify, challenge and address underachievement – good

### External support

The LA has provided good support and the link officer has a sound grasp of how the school is tackling the improvement agenda. The LA brought in and has supported the acting headteacher who has made such a positive difference to the school. It has provided consultants to support the drive for improvement, particularly in teaching. Since the previous monitoring inspection LA staff have undertaken two reviews of the school's work and its progress towards overcoming its weaknesses. The school finds the reports of these reviews helpful.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Use assessment information more effectively and consistently to support the tailoring of work in lessons to meet the range of pupils' learning needs.
- Further build capacity and skill at middle leadership level.