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9 July 2010

Mr David Shield  
Headteacher  
Seaham School of Technology  
Burnhall Drive  
Seaham  
County Durham  
SR7 0EN

Dear Mr Shield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Seaham School of Technology

Following my visit with Peter Cox, additional inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 July 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.



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 Durham local authority.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Seaham School of Technology

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7–8 July 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents and students' books. They met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, staff, the associate headteacher, the National Challenge Advisor, students, and representatives of the governing body and local authority.

## Context

A small number of staff have left the school or will leave at the end of the summer term. This includes some senior and middle leaders. A new head of science and second in the department have been appointed. The head of science has yet to take up his post but he is working in the school one day each week. A new head of English has been appointed for September. A local authority consultant is leading the English department until the new head of department takes up her post. The ex-head of English is now leading the development of literacy skills across the curriculum. A new director of specialism has been appointed; she is currently the head of technology. A new assistant headteacher took up his post in April. Some posts remain vacant including a newly created deputy headteacher post. The school plans to advertise these vacancies at the start of the autumn term. The associate headteacher continues to support the school but his support has been reduced to one day each week and it will cease at the end of the summer term. Year 11 students were not in school during the inspection and Year 10 students were on work experience. There was some disruption to the timetables of students in Years 7 to 9 because of previously planned events and activities.

## Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The school expects a much higher proportion of students to gain five or more GCSE A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, than did so in 2009. Nearly half of all students in Year 11 have already attained these grades in English and nearly a third in mathematics so the school's predictions are achievable. The school also expects outcomes in science to rise significantly with more than 70% of students expected to attain two A\* to C grades or equivalent. Students in Year 11 have made better progress than in the past because the curriculum was well adapted to their needs and they benefited from well-targeted support and intervention. The school has already identified the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the current Year 10 cohort achieve at least as well as their predecessors.

Students do not progress as well in Key Stage 3. Most students make satisfactory progress in lessons and this is an improvement but there is scope to accelerate their



progress further. Teachers use assessment data to plan lessons that are reasonably well matched to students' needs. They do not take sufficient account of information from marking or from their observations of students' work during lessons so they miss opportunities to tackle misconceptions or eradicate weaknesses in students' basic skills by working with individuals or small groups during the lesson. Some teachers do not build sufficiently well on students' previous attainment. This is particularly the case for some of the most able students in Year 7 and a small number of students' books show a marked decline in both the quality and quantity of work as the year progresses.

The school has implemented strategies to improve students' literacy skills in all curriculum areas. This work is at an early stage but staff in subject departments have recognised that this is a worthwhile ambition and have reacted positively to training. Students' reading skills are improving at a faster rate than their writing because the school tackles weaknesses in reading systematically. There are regular assessments and students are provided with activities that help them to improve. This is not the case in writing. Teachers identify weaknesses in the use of punctuation or grammar during marking but they do not routinely provide students with well-targeted teaching that helps them to improve, apply and consolidate these skills.

In most lessons students are provided with tasks that require them to solve problems or plan and organise their work. They respond well to this but because teachers do not provide them with the practical resources and support that they need, they do not always carry out the tasks effectively. Students say that the tasks that they are given are more interesting than in the past and that they have more opportunities to work with a partner or small group. They say that they enjoy working in this way and they think that it helps to improve their learning.

The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities has risen sharply and is now well above average. The local authority has helped the school to review its procedures to identify these students and their progress is evaluated during the authority's regular monitoring visits. Students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities progress as well as their peers in lessons and some make better than expected progress because they receive well-targeted support.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science and ensure that all students make at least satisfactory progress by:
  - improving the quality of teaching and learning in these subjects
  - encouraging students to learn independently – satisfactory



## Other relevant student outcomes

Students have good opportunities to contribute to the school's improvement. Their views are taken into account by staff and by the local authority during monitoring visits and they can see that they are helping to make a difference. Students have an accurate understanding of the things that have improved and of what remains to be done. Most students are very proud of the school and enjoy all that it provides. Their attendance is improving and the proportion of students that are persistent non-attenders is declining. Students' behaviour is generally good. They say that behaviour in and around school has improved and that the very small proportion of low-level disruption that still occurs is well managed by staff. The school has taken some small but significant steps that have improved students' confidence and motivation. They are better prepared for lessons. For example, at the start of the summer term any student who did not bring a pen, pencil and their planner to school was kept in detention. During the first few days a very high proportion of students were kept behind but this number reduced significantly within a short time. The school still makes regular checks but most students now arrive at school prepared to learn. Students say that they are now better organised because they always have their planners so they know what they must do.

## The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is improving. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and there is more good and better teaching than in the past. Staff have benefited from effective professional development and training. There are regular lesson observations and work scrutiny, and teachers are given feedback about their work and offered support to help them improve further. Staff have responded to this well and, because they know what is expected of them, they expect more of their students. Lesson planning is clear and the objective of the lesson is shared with students. The tasks given to students are interesting and students are beginning to evaluate their own progress or that of their peers and this is promoting their understanding. Teachers use assessment data effectively to track students' progress and to identify any underachievement. In the most effective lessons teachers provide different tasks for students of different abilities but this is not the case in all lessons. Some teachers do not make enough use of opportunities to work with students during the lesson in order to improve their understanding or skills.

The school is aware that the specialism is not making sufficient impact on raising students' attainment or on the wider curriculum. Many younger students are not aware of what it means to the school or how it might make a difference to their learning. One boy said, 'we have technology in our name but there is no evidence of it in school'. He was referring to a perceived lack of high-specification computers and equipment but the fact that he had not understood that technology might mean more than this underlines the need for the school to do more to develop this aspect of its work.



Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - identifying clear lesson objectives and sharing them with students
  - increasing teachers' expectations of students – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been reviewed and the headteacher and governors have developed a leadership structure that ensures that all aspects of the school's work are identified and that management responsibilities are clear. The school has implemented robust procedures to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. Clear written guidance identifies all the steps in the school's self-evaluation procedures. This guidance ensures that inexperienced senior and middle leaders know what they are expected to do and how to do it. This is helping them to develop increasingly effective leadership skills. The headteacher receives a range of information that helps him to check on the school's effectiveness and plan further improvements. He holds regular, tightly focused, meetings with senior staff during which progress in their areas of responsibility is reviewed. The outcomes of school monitoring and evaluation inform teachers' performance management targets and the school is setting some whole-school performance targets. Governors have received training that has helped them become more effective. The monitoring reports written by middle and senior leaders provide useful information for curriculum governors and help the governing body to hold the headteacher to account for the school's improvement.

Newly appointed and temporary staff have made a very positive start and are making a strong contribution to the school's improvement. The school has an increasingly accurate view of its current effectiveness. External support is being reduced significantly and the headteacher and his team are demonstrating that they have the capacity to lead the school's future development.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the rigour with which the school evaluates its work, particularly the quality of teaching and learning, in order to bring about sustained improvement by:
  - ensuring that monitoring procedures are consistent across the school
  - developing the expertise of middle managers so the monitoring of their areas is sharply focused and leads to improvements in teaching and learning – good



## External support

The local authority has supported the school very effectively. The support was targeted towards the school's first months in special measures and this accelerated the school's progress by providing a wealth of specialist knowledge and expertise. Local authority consultants have worked alongside staff to develop good practice and have provided very effective short-term leadership to key departments. The National Challenge Advisor works closely with the school. He has an accurate view of what has been achieved and of the challenges that remain. The local authority monitors the school's progress robustly. Monitoring activities and reports are thorough and build confidence in the school by identifying what has been achieved and making clear where further improvements are needed. The local authority has a well-thought-out 'exit strategy' and it is beginning to withdraw support from the school. The involvement of the highly effective and influential associate headteacher will cease at the end of the summer term and the support of consultants and other staff will be reduced, although some external support will continue to be targeted to clearly identified needs. Local authority monitoring activities will continue so if the school's current trend of improvement should decline this will be identified at an early stage and action will be taken to improve matters.

## Priorities for further improvement

- There are no priorities for further improvement. The school should continue to focus on the areas for improvement identified during its last inspection.

