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9 July 2010

Mr Roy Vaughan
Executive Headteacher
Darton High School
Churchfield Lane
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Barnsley
S75 5EW

Dear Mr Vaughan

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Darton High School

Following my visit with Jon Lovgreen and Pankaj Gulab, additional inspectors, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – **satisfactory**.

Newly qualified teachers **may not** be appointed.

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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Darton High School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work including 29 parts of lessons, an assembly and two tutorial periods. Documents were scrutinised and meetings held with the executive headteacher and other nominated staff, three groups of students, a representative from the local authority, the School Improvement Partner and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The headteacher at the time of the last inspection left the school shortly afterwards and an executive headteacher took up post on 19 April 2010. In the intervening time, the deputy headteacher led the school supported by a headteacher from another Barnsley school. The new executive headteacher is contracted from Castleford High School for two terms. Castleford High School is in a neighbouring local authority and was judged as outstanding at its last inspection. It is a National Support School and will continue to work with Darton High until it is removed from special measures. Interviews for a new permanent headteacher take place next week. Plans to stand down the governing body and establish an interim executive board from the 1 April 2010 were delayed by the general election. In the meantime, an Ofsted Review Committee has been established consisting of six governors. This committee met for the first time in late April.

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

Students' attainment and achievement were reported in detail at the time of the last inspection.

Lesson observations carried out by the school, external consultants and inspectors show that students are making better progress in lessons. In particular, the number of lessons in which students made inadequate progress has reduced considerably since April. There are still too many lessons, however, in which students are passive and disengaged. In the best lessons, students of all levels of ability participate well in activities and are challenged to think independently. They work at a lively pace and enjoy their learning. In the less effective lessons, students work slowly and need regular reminders to focus on the task. Progress was satisfactory or better in most of the lessons observed by inspectors.

A more robust system for tracking students' progress has been introduced since the inspection, enabling staff to identify and support under-achieving students more quickly. Last minute interventions to help current Year 11 students were well

planned and students found them very helpful. Focused interventions strategies have already been implemented to support Year 10 students. Internal assessment information for students in Year 11 suggests that the outcomes of external examinations this summer will be better than last year. The school expects over 51% of Year 11 students to obtain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, an increase of seven percentage points on last year. School tracking data suggest that the current Year 11 students have made better progress than their counterparts last year but considerably less progress than similar students nationally.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise attainment and accelerate progress - **satisfactory**

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The downward trend in attendance has been reversed by using carefully targeted interventions involving students and their parents and carers. The importance of regular attendance has been promoted to parents, carers and students, a reward system has been introduced to encourage good attendance and the minimum attendance threshold is clear and well understood. The current attendance rate for this academic year is 91.8%, which is only slightly higher than last year, but there have been month by month improvements since the inspection. Too many students are still arriving late to lessons. An educational welfare officer has been working full-time at the school for the last four weeks and the number of persistent absentees has already reduced markedly.

A 'behaviour and inclusion philosophy' has been agreed with students, parents and carers and staff. Expectations of staff by students and vice versa are displayed in every classroom alongside the sanctions and rewards scheme. Parents and carers have been made aware of the new policy in a letter. Students say that teachers have a more consistent approach to improving behaviour, but the sanction and rewards system is not yet applied consistently by every teacher. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been reduced considerably, but the number of students in the seclusion unit is still high, although there are far fewer serious offences.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement

- Strengthen outcomes in other areas of provision, by:
 - reversing the downward trend in attendance by carefully targeted intervention involving students and their parents and carers
 - communicating clearly to students, staff and parents high expectations of behaviour, and applying these consistently - **satisfactory**

The effectiveness of provision

Lesson observations by inspectors show that teaching has improved since the local authority review in April. The school prioritised support for the least effective teachers and has reduced the proportion of inadequate teaching. The high rate of staff absence affects the quality of teaching. Senior leaders are tackling the problem and making progress but this is taking time, leaving the school reliant on supply teachers meanwhile.

Recently introduced initiatives are providing a better framework for improving teaching and learning. They include an agreed lesson plan format, marking policy and the key features of a good lesson. These are understood by staff, accepted by most and used by an increasing number. The school has tightened systems for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teaching through observations, detailed record keeping, learning walks and work scrutiny. Weaknesses are followed up with individual staff and coaching and support are given. Lesson observations are not being carried out frequently enough, however, and the number of managers carrying out observations is too small.

Lesson planning is sound and there is a growing awareness of the value of using students' performance data and targets to plan activities to meet the different needs of students in the group. Good examples of this were seen in mathematics, modern foreign languages, history and dance. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards in most lessons. Students know their targets and the level at which they are currently working but the quality of marking is still too variable. In the best lessons, interesting resources and short focused tasks are used to grab and maintain students' interest. Learning is checked and consolidated at regular intervals throughout the lesson. Tasks stretch and challenge students working at different levels and teachers have high expectations in terms of participation and behaviour. The less effective lessons often get off to a slow start with students arriving late. Teachers in these lessons often mistake quiet compliance for understanding and chatter for productive discussion.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There has been a new sense of purpose and determination in the school since the end of April. Staff can see the way forward and the pace of improvement is accelerating. The new executive headteacher has introduced much needed ambition, confidence and structure to the school. He has chosen wisely not to impose systems, but has taken a long term view, and is building the capacity of senior leaders by developing strategies and policies that are tailored to Darton High.

In the first two months following the departure of the previous headteacher, the senior leadership team was well under capacity as three of the team had additional middle management responsibilities. Progress in tackling the priorities for improvement was slow. The new executive headteacher introduced a new management structure with clear lines of accountability and accompanying job roles. Senior leaders are now much more focused and effective. They meet regularly with the Ofsted Recovery Committee to discuss progress in their areas of responsibility. They are learning to focus on the impact of actions rather than the process and are honing their evaluative skills. The middle leadership team has been strengthened through a combination of new appointments, professional development and more focused support from senior leaders. Middle leaders are also benefitting from working more closely as a team and 'buddying' with their opposite number at Castleford High.

The Ofsted Recovery Committee has also played a key role in accelerating the rate of progress since April. Members of the committee have a good blend of expertise and local knowledge and they are giving freely of their time. They are very supportive of the senior leadership team but are not afraid to challenge. The committee is very determined and ambitious but realistic about the time needed to address the areas for improvement. They are monitoring the development plan very closely. They are active in promoting plans for improvement in the community, amongst parents and carers and to staff. The committee is supporting the executive headteacher well in tackling inadequate teaching and other staffing problems.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- ensure that leadership and management at all levels has greater impact on the school's effectiveness – **satisfactory**

The specialism is making a satisfactory contribution to the school's improvement. Financial support has provided interactive whiteboards and computers that are enhancing the quality of learning. Staff from the specialism make a strong contribution to the coaching team used to support staff and improve teaching. The specialism also led the school's contribution to the Darton Carnival promoting the school and rebuilding its reputation in the community.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is comprehensive and fit for purpose despite a couple of unrealistically ambitious targets. The local authority has provided good support for the school since the last inspection. The headteacher from one of the authority's schools was deployed to give support until the executive headteacher took up post. The local authority has also financed additional senior posts and the recruitment process for a new headteacher. Advisers have provided valuable support to the English and mathematics departments and worked with the school to improve

behaviour and attendance. The executive headteacher values the advice from the finance and human resources departments on budgetary and personnel issues and benefits from regular meetings with the link adviser. The School Improvement Partner is also supporting the school and contributed to the April review. Castleford High School is giving invaluable support through the executive headteacher, staff exchanges and leadership visits.

Priorities for further improvement

- More rigorous and regular checks on the quality of teaching by a wider team.