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26 September 2018

Mr Con Todd
Principal
Freebrough Academy
Linden Road
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Dear Mr Todd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Freebrough Academy

Following my visit with Michael Maddison, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12–13 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school’s recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2018.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust’s statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school’s action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Redcar and Cleveland. This

letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Barry Found
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018.

- Urgently improve safeguarding procedures in school by ensuring that:
 - leaders regularly monitor the attendance and whereabouts of pupils who attend alternative provision
 - attendance registers are accurately maintained
 - leaders act quickly to find suitable alternative courses for pupils if/when current arrangements cease.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching, learning and assessment, especially in English, mathematics, science and humanities by:
 - ensuring that the work pupils complete builds on their prior knowledge and understanding
 - urgently raising teachers' expectations so that all pupils are challenged appropriately
 - introducing systems to ensure that absent pupils catch up on their return to school
 - ensuring that teachers' assessment is rooted in firm evidence to accurately reflect the progress pupils make
 - reviewing schemes of work to ensure that pupils are given sufficient time to explore topics in detail
 - clarifying expectations of teachers and pupils in relation to the completion of pupils' homework.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management so that all pupils, including pupils who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities, make at least good progress from their starting points by ensuring that:
 - staffing instability is reduced considerably
 - leaders conduct routine checks on the accuracy of assessment
 - the actions of leaders, including governors and the multi-academy trust (the trust), do not negatively impact on the school's effectiveness for the benefit of the trust
 - leaders accurately evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
 - staff consistently apply school behaviour and assessment policies.
- Urgently improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that pupils attend school more often and persistent absenteeism decreases, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN

and/or disabilities

- reviewing the curriculum for all pupils who attend alternative provision so that courses meet their needs
- reducing staff inconsistencies in the application of the behaviour management policy
- raising teacher expectations in relation to acceptable standards of pupil behaviour
- significantly reducing the proportion of pupils who are internally and externally excluded for a fixed period
- addressing the increasing number of bullying incidents in the school
- ensuring that all pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and consistently show respect to others and the school site.

External reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 September 2018 to 13 September 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers at different stages of their careers, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Teesside Learning Trust and, in addition, the lead inspector had a phone conversation with the chair of the rapid improvement board (RIB). Inspectors also met with pupils from each year group and talked with pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Inspectors visited a range of lessons, jointly with senior leaders and education consultants who currently work with the school. Leaders were observed giving feedback to teachers.

An inspector visited ARCHWAY, one of six alternative provisions used by the school, and held discussions with staff.

During this first monitoring visit, inspectors focused on the areas for improvement linked to leadership and management, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

Context

Since the inspection in April 2018, there have been significant changes in staffing at all levels. The principal left in July 2018 and an assistant principal left in May 2018. New governance arrangements are now in place in the form of an RIB. The board of trustees maintains the responsibility for holding the chief executive to account for the performance of the schools in the multi-academy trust. The RIB has delegated powers to hold school leaders to account and is a point of reference for the trustees, who in turn hold the RIB to account for the performance of the school.

Several temporary teachers have left the school since the last inspection and appropriate permanent replacements have been recruited. An interim principal was appointed in August. Senior leadership roles and responsibilities have been restructured with the addition of two associate assistant principal posts being created to further enhance capacity at this level. An experienced school leader from within the trust has also been deployed at the school to support the development of teaching and learning.

The school works closely with the Macmillan Academy in Middlesbrough. An experienced deputy principal from Macmillan with expertise in teaching and learning is now supporting the school for two and a half days per week.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The CEO of the trust and the trustees have shown a focused response to the inspection findings. Leaders accepted their failure to ensure that all pupils were safe and, as a result, have acted quickly to ensure that arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils in the school, and particularly those who attend alternative provision, are effective and improved. Furthermore, the local academy council has been dissolved, and a new RIB was formed, with clear terms of reference. These changes were, in part, informed by a trust-wide external review of governance which took place in June and July.

The RIB has been quick to assess its needs in terms of the essential information which will be required to hold school leaders effectively to account. The RIB has developed a key performance indicator dashboard which is monitored every two weeks and provides the RIB with a wide range of comprehensive information. Leaders have also accepted the recommendations of a pupil premium review but have not agreed a plan to address the issues raised.

The new interim principal joined the school at the start of the autumn term and, as a result, the pace of change has already increased. Senior and middle leaders understand the need for urgency in having a positive impact on the progress pupils make, along with their behaviour and attendance.

All staff accept the accuracy of the April 2018 inspection judgement, and that there is a need to change the way in which the school has been working. The school's initial analysis of the results achieved by the pupils who finished Year 11 in July 2018 suggest a further decline in standards from that of 2017.

Following the publication of the last inspection report, leaders were quick to organise and establish a parent forum. Parents, carers and pupils raised concerns about the number of supply and cover staff at the school. Leaders have reacted to these concerns and, at the time of this monitoring visit, levels of supply and cover staff were much reduced compared to the previous academic year. Pupils now report with positivity that there is a much greater consistency in the effectiveness of teaching because of this reduction in temporary staff.

Leaders have demonstrated, through the introduction of new strategies to improve behaviour and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, that they have a clear focus and understanding of the need to establish foundations for further improvement and to raise the expectations of pupils. These changes are in the very early stages and although improvements in pupil behaviour are observable, there remains a lack of demonstrable impact on the quality of teaching and learning. This should now be a priority for development. The staff who talked to inspectors were appreciative of the higher profile of senior leaders around the school and in lessons. Staff also reported that their professional development is now focused on current priorities. Staff recognise that pupils' attitudes to learning are beginning to change

positively in response to the minimum expectations of teachers to follow the 'non-negotiable' routines at the start of, and during, lessons.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning remains variable. In the lessons inspectors observed, teachers had high expectations of pupils' standards of behaviour and this created an environment in which there is scope for the further development of teaching and learning. Throughout the school and across subjects, with few exceptions, inspectors saw a lack of challenge in the work set and low expectations in terms of the progress of pupils. In a small minority of lessons, for example in French, the prior knowledge of pupils had been taken into consideration when planning activities. In most lessons, however, this was not the case. Middle leaders have worked closely with partner primary schools to inform their review of key stage 3 schemes of work to develop greater challenge and build upon prior learning. The impact of this work on the progress of pupils is not clear to see and will be a focus for the next monitoring inspection.

Inspectors found it difficult to establish a school-wide consistency in approaches to assessment. Improving the accuracy of the assessment of pupils' work has been a focus for leaders, although at this point progress is slow. Teachers are working closely with other schools to develop their assessment practice, but it is fair to say that, at the time of this inspection, leaders agree that across subjects the reliability of assessment remains uncertain. Although a new assessment policy is in development, it has not been shared with staff and has not been implemented. While this remains the case, teachers and leaders will be unable to reliably identify the most effective means of accelerating pupils' progress. It is, therefore, crucial that leaders consider this aspect of improvement as an urgent priority.

Leaders are accurate in their views on the quality of teaching and learning and recognise that much work needs to be done to identify the areas of teaching, learning and assessment which need the most urgent improvement. This will then enable leaders to develop strategies which will have a rapid impact on the progress of all pupils.

Pupils report that teaching and learning are now more consistent since the number of supply and cover teachers has reduced. They are still of the view that there remains too much repetition of work and too little challenge in some of their subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The attendance of pupils remains well below that of pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils who fail to attend school regularly is well above the national average too. Since the last inspection, a new attendance team has been created with new leadership from an assistant principal. The trust has recently appointed an

educational welfare officer (EWO) to work across the trust's schools. Presently, the EWO has been assigned to two and a half days a week to support the school.

Policies and procedures have been reviewed and pastoral leaders across the school have a key role to play in raising the profile of good attendance with pupils. Inspectors observed several inconsistencies in policy and practice. Leaders acknowledge that these inconsistencies need to be resolved quickly to give a clear and consistent message to pupils about the expectations the school has in terms of their attendance and punctuality to school and lessons.

The monitoring of attendance of those pupils who attend alternative provision has been systematically improved and now is rigorous, robust and fit for ensuring that the school knows their whereabouts and that they are safe. Leaders have implemented a rigorous system of quality assurance visits to alternative providers and are now able to make more informed decisions regarding appropriate choice of course for those pupils who attend. All courses in alternative provision lead to suitable qualifications and allow pupils to progress into employment and training.

Pupils and staff report there has been significant improvement in pupils' behaviour, both in lessons and around the building. Pupils still report that, at times, pushing in corridors does occur, but to a much lesser extent than it once did. It is also encouraging to see that pupils are taking some responsibility for these improvements too. They have formed a 'Freebrough Against Bullying' (FAB) group and leaders are pleased that incidents of all forms of bullying have fallen dramatically.

There is a much greater presence of staff around the site and inspectors recognise that behaviour is less boisterous than was described in the previous inspection report. Most pupils are respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. Inspectors observed a consistency of approach in managing behaviour in classrooms. Leaders have worked hard with staff to establish their 'Pivotal' approach to behaviour management through focused training and role modelling around the school. At this point early in the new academic year, the levels of internal and external exclusion have risen sharply. Leaders point to 'spikes' in their exclusion information which correspond to the introduction of raised expectations since the start of the new term. Leaders are expecting these levels to fall as pupils become familiar with these new expectations.

Outcomes for pupils

Trustees and leaders report that early indications from the 2018 results for Year 11 pupils suggest there has been a further decline in standards. During this monitoring visit, inspectors observed that pupils have fallen behind their peers nationally in several subjects and significantly in mathematics. Leaders are aware of the hard work that remains to be done to accelerate pupils' progress to allow them to catch up and close gaps. Trustees and leaders recognise they must develop leadership at

all levels if they are to achieve their goals.

External support

The support commissioned from Macmillan Academy and from within the trust is at an early stage and it is too early to assess its impact on the effectiveness of leadership.