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Mrs Maryssa O'Connor  
Principal  
North Shore Academy  
Talbot Street  
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Cleveland  
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Dear Mrs O'Connor

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to North Shore Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2016 the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- Intensify the impact of leadership and management on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching, by:
  - swiftly addressing remaining variability in the quality of teaching
  - increasing levels of challenge for pupils in lessons
  - brokering stronger support from the trust to help develop expertise, particularly for middle leaders and teachers new to their careers
  - continuing to improve the accuracy of assessment.

- Accelerate improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in mathematics.
- Rapidly improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils through closer monitoring, more focused teaching and interventions, and stronger links with parents.
- Build upon recent actions to improve attendance so that pupils are not disadvantaged by their absence from school.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders and a range of staff to discuss the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I undertook learning walks with you and carried out additional observations where I also looked at work in books and folders. I met with the trust's director of secondary schools. I also held a joint meeting with the new chair of the governing body and the school's achievement partner. I met a group of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had noticed since the last inspection. In addition, I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including self-evaluation documents, assessment information on current progress and safeguarding documents.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, considerable staffing changes have taken place. Approximately half of the teaching staff were new to the school in September 2016. A new principal, vice-principal and assistant principal have been appointed with a further assistant principal joining in April 2017. In addition, a number of newly qualified teachers have joined the school.

## **Main findings**

School leaders have started to introduce changes that are providing a platform for improvements to teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour and welfare. However, the overall impact of changes is limited and the rate of progress remains too slow. Despite anticipated improvements, outcomes for pupils fell in summer 2016, to levels below the government's floor standards, the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. In addition, progress for disadvantaged pupils remains low in many areas. While these outcomes were affected by the instability in senior leadership that the school experienced in 2015 to 2016, they still reflect widespread underperformance. This shows that areas for improvement have not been addressed with sufficient urgency.

The trust has addressed the need to provide a settled leadership team with the majority of senior leaders now in place. The new principal has reviewed leadership and the management structure in conjunction with the school improvement partner.

She has a clear vision for the school's development and has begun to implement a coherent strategy for improvement. She has launched a new 'school within schools' system to promote closer monitoring of pupils' progress and enable teachers to consider how the wider personal and social needs of pupils impact upon their academic progress. Pupils believe these new systems are contributing to improving standards of behaviour and that teachers now have a stronger awareness of their needs. However, these systems remain in their infancy and considerable support will be required for them to be firmly embedded so that pupils' progress can be accelerated.

A new model of governance has been brought to the school, founded on a 'portfolio' approach where individual governors maintain oversight for particular areas of the school. Governors with specific expertise monitor key aspects of the school's work and leaders at all levels are more rigorously held to account for ongoing progress. The new chair of the governing body has prioritised the accuracy of assessment as a key issue as the lack of accurate information prevented previous governors from holding leaders to account effectively enough. In 2016, only a third of predictions in mathematics were correct while in many other subjects predictions were rarely more than 50% accurate. As a result, leaders have invested considerable time in carrying out moderation of pupils' work across the trust and early indications suggest that current standards are improving. However, the level of inaccuracy has been such that governors will need to ensure that robust checks are in place to give them confidence in the progress information so that the considerable underperformance of 2016 cannot be repeated.

The principal has established new processes to accelerate improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Middle leaders are more closely involved in monitoring effectiveness and in holding their teams to account. Systems to track pupils' progress are implemented with greater rigour and consistency. School evaluations of teaching show some improvements in quality but too much variability remains. The school's own data acknowledges that a lack of challenge continues in half of lessons and results confirm this. New staff at the beginning of their careers show considerable energy and commitment but require close support in their emerging careers to strengthen their expertise, hone their skills and strengthen their behaviour management skills. While subject leaders have received support in monitoring standards and improving the accuracy of assessment, they have not had as much support in developing practice to improve outcomes. The trust's appointment of subject directors has the potential to address this need but as yet this support has not led to sufficient improvement in classroom practice.

Leaders have intensified their actions to improve pupils' attendance. Since the beginning of term, the number of home visits has almost trebled and staff have received new guidance on pursuing absence with greater rigour. In addition to building closer relationships with families, stricter sanctions have also been imposed with a significant increase in the issuing of fixed penalty notices. These strategies are beginning to show some signs of improving attendance from the mid-point of

the first term, although overall rates of attendance remain stubbornly low.

Since the last inspection, the principal and her new team have introduced new systems that are creating more cohesive academic and pastoral support. Systems to track pupils' progress are now implemented more rigorously and considerable work has been carried out to improve the accuracy of assessment. The new chair and the governing body have established much stronger systems to hold leaders at all levels to account. However, the overall pace of improvement has been too slow and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not improving rapidly enough to ensure that the poor outcomes of 2016 are not replicated.

### **External support**

The trust has worked more intensively with the school to establish a settled leadership team and to improve the quality of governance. Trust networks have more recently supported leaders in improving the accuracy of assessment. A school partner, brokered by the trust, has supported the principal in diagnosing current weaknesses and devising strategies for improvement. While the trust has fortified leadership structures and supported the diagnosis of performance, it has been less proactive in supporting improvements in the quality of teaching. While new subject directors are beginning to address this need, leaders still lack this rigorous support, which is crucial given the large proportion of new staff, a number of whom are at the early stages of their teaching careers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**