

Suite 22
West Lancashire Investment Centre
Maple View
White Moss Business Park
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566934
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: gtunncliffe@cfbt.com



13 October 2010

Mrs Angela Schofield
Principal
Southern Cross School
Barlow Hall Road
Chorlton-Cum-Hardy
Manchester
Lancashire
M21 7JJ

Dear Mrs Schofield

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Southern Cross School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 October 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please give my particular thanks to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the students and parents who gave their time to meet with me.

Since the last inspection in February 2010, a shadow governing body has been formed and is expected to take up its full responsibilities from January 2011. There are currently two teachers and two teaching assistants absent from the school. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed permanently to each of the Southern Cross and Castlefield campuses.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 February 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making **good** progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Students' achievement has improved since the last inspection. Progress has accelerated at both key stages, but is particularly rapid at Key Stage 3. The school's assessments are increasingly rigorous and are used more effectively so that lessons are better matched to the wide range of attainment within the classes. As a result, some Key Stage 3 students' attainment in science has risen from National Curriculum p-levels to Level 3 in sixth months. Improvements in mathematics are similar. There are some students who, prior to this year, would not sit down to complete a test. They have now done so and secure assessments have been made. This gives the

school a better basis on which to judge students' progress during the current school year. Students' attainment in English has not yet been formally assessed. However, in a Year 7 English lesson on Roald Dahl's 'The Twits', planning was precise. It matched the wide range of students' attainment with individual targets and gave them increasing challenge. Generally more is expected of students and this is accelerating the rate at which they are learning. Students' literacy and numeracy skills have grown as teachers have extended their use of effective strategies to pre-empt inappropriate behaviour. As a result, students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are changing for the better. They are more involved in lessons and are prepared to give their thoughts as they become more confident. For example, in a Key Stage 4 business lesson, students asserted their views about the products they preferred to make and market. They eagerly and independently researched sources of raw materials using the internet. Students' positive responses in lessons indicate they are increasingly motivated by their success in learning, rather than by a reward system. The number of students who left Year 11 in 2010 with one or more qualifications increased when compared to previous years, as did those with other awards, including Duke of Edinburgh and Prince's Trust bronze and gold awards. A greater proportion gained GCSEs in English, mathematics and art.

Students' contribution to the school and the wider community is growing. For example, during tutorials all students in Key Stage 4 gave their ideas for improving the school to the school council. Key Stage 3 students sang and played recorders with greater confidence as they prepared for a concert for an audience in the wider community. Students are better prepared for the future and for employment as their behaviour, attitudes and literacy and numeracy skills improve. At Key Stage 3, attendance is improving dramatically. At Key Stage 4, the school recognises that attendance needs to improve further, although strategies to do this are starting to have some effect. The school has analysed trends and patterns and adjusted the timetable to reflect students' needs and interests better and to provide more personalised programmes. Altered timing and length of lessons on both sites capitalise better on students' alertness and concentration.

The example set by senior leaders has raised staff's expectations of their students. Teachers' wider repertoire of skills to manage challenging behaviour has significantly reduced incidents of disruption. Mathematics at Key Stage 3 is now taught by a teacher with strong subject knowledge and this is increasing students' understanding and progress. At Key Stage 4, better behaviour management is enabling students to benefit from the teacher's mathematical skills. At both key stages, teaching assistants provide more effective support in lessons to keep students on track. Sharper use of questions helps to check out any misunderstanding. Improved marking gives students a better idea of what they have to do to improve their work. There are also more opportunities for students to assess their progress towards their targets. However, the students' role in identifying the next steps in their learning remains at a very early stage of development.

There are secure plans for the handover from the interim executive board to the governing body. Some members of the board will transfer to the governing body, ensuring continuity in chairing meetings and extended skills in evaluating the school's work. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board, who is also a National Leader in Education, the principal and the heads of centre continue to have an accurate and realistic view of the school's strengths. They have been central to driving improvement and have a clear ambitious vision of what remains to be done. The new deputy headteachers bring additional strength to this leadership team. Leaders' expertise is shared more widely with staff so that subject leaders are starting to take a stronger role in monitoring teaching and students' progress.

The local authority's statement of action fulfils the requirements. The local authority has provided wide-ranging expertise which has helped the school improve all aspects of its performance. Regular visits from the School Improvement Partner have helped to challenge the school to improve. The senior school effectiveness officer's close view and accurate understanding have also helped the school to build better capacity for further improvement.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Liz Godman

Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Accelerate students' learning, by:
 - tailoring the provision to individual students' needs and styles of learning
 - taking prompt action to support students who show signs of falling behind
 - setting challenging but highly achievable short-term targets to boost students' self-confidence as learners
 - ensuring that rewards are linked more closely to individual targets
 - ensuring that students are given a clear picture of how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that at least 80% is good or better, by:
 - raising staff's expectations of good student behaviour and effective learning
 - ensuring all staff have an extensive bank of effective strategies to manage students' behaviour and to keep low level disruption to a minimum
 - ensuring that teachers have the necessary subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum and the expertise to teach basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics
 - identifying the steps needed to make students' learning secure and modelling them effectively.
- Raise attendance to at least 85% by using the information from an analysis of trends and patterns in attendance to make organisational changes and to implement individual programmes.
- Strengthen the school's capacity for sustained improvement, by
 - ensuring that governors in the planned committees (to take over from the Interim Executive Board) have the skills and knowledge needed to evaluate critically the school's performance
 - sharpening the skills of senior managers and subject leaders in evaluating the impact of action against intended outcomes for students and identifying what has been effective and why
 - sharing expertise and using more creatively resources within the school and Federation to fill gaps in students' learning and to raise standards overall.