

Suite 22 West Lincs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: gtunncliffe@cftb.com

26 November 2010

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

Dear Mr Shield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Seaham School of Technology

Following my visit with Mark Wilson, additional inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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

Newly qualified teachers may 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 Durham.

Yours sincerely

Peter Cox
Additional inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2009

- 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.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - identifying clear lesson objectives and sharing them with students
 - increasing teachers' expectations of learners
 - ensuring that work is closely matched to the needs of all students
 - encouraging students to learn independently
 - improving the quality, consistency and use of assessment data.
- Increase the rigour with which the school evaluates its own work, particularly the quality of teaching and learning, in order to bring about sustained improvement by:
 - ensuring 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.

Special measures: monitoring of Seaham School of Technology

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised a range of documents including the most recent local authority and School Improvement Partner reports, as well as recent questionnaire responses from a sample of parents and carers initiated by the school. An analysis of a wide range of students' work was undertaken and 27 teachers were observed teaching. Inspectors met with school staff including members of the senior leadership team, the director of specialism and some heads of department. They held meetings with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in July 2010 there have been a number of staff changes, some staff have left and others retired. The senior leadership team has been restructured and roles and responsibilities clarified. An assistant headteacher gained promotion and left in the summer and is being replaced by a deputy headteacher, starting at the beginning of the spring term 2011. New heads of department for religious education, English, personal, social and health education as well as science started in September 2010 as did two additional learning support assistants. The school made two internal appointments of progress managers for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Two new members have joined the governing body, both of whom have experience in education. A new head of art has been appointed for January 2011.

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

Unvalidated examination results taken by Year 11 students in summer 2010, indicate strong improvements being made in raising overall attainment. The proportion of students gaining five GCSE grades of C and above, including English and mathematics, increased from 28% in 2009 to 54%. In English, attainment rose as it did in mathematics, although overall was still significantly below that seen nationally. However, some students on the school roll but provided for elsewhere, did not attain well enough in English and mathematics and consequently had a negative impact on overall attainment. In light of this, the school's leadership has brought this provision back into school. Overall, a range of intervention activities introduced in 2010 have helped raise attainment. Students known to be eligible for a free school meal secured better attainment when compared to the national picture as did those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the proportion of those securing the higher grades of A* and A in three or more subjects, remains a school

priority. The accurate tracking systems used by the school indicate that students currently in Year 11 are on track to secure improved levels of attainment when compared to last year's cohort, both of which had similar starting points.

The strengthened leadership in English and science as well as the improved leadership in mathematics has given a greater impetus to focusing on what lessons need to do to meet students' needs. In 2010, the proportion of students gaining two GCSE grade C's and above in science increased from 35% in 2009 to 81%. The science curriculum has been adjusted to better match the needs of the students. Progress in lessons has improved and students talk of how much more they prefer the practical learning opportunities provided. In mathematics, students in the current Year 11 are on course to achieve better than last year's Year 11 students. The school recognises that staffing turbulence is an issue for the department and students confirm that the discontinuity in teaching leading to some lack of learning and progress causes them concern. The head of mathematics has worked hard to mitigate these problems; however, there is still further work to be done. Improvements in English are also being secured.

The current cohort of students in Year 11 is on track to achieve better than students from last year's Year 11. The improved attainment across the subjects has been helped by much more rigorous data management of students' progress and helps ensure more targeted support is provided. However, teachers are not always using data well enough when planning lessons to meet the needs of students, especially for those students needing to make up lost ground in their learning because of previous underachievement and inadequate teaching. There is now much greater rigour in holding teachers and leaders to account for students' progress, although these procedures are still embedding and the full impact, in terms of meeting students' needs, is yet to be realised.

Students are developing a sharper understanding of what is required of them to make better progress; however, there is still a way to go as not all students are given sufficient opportunities in lessons to develop independent learning skills. Furthermore, some students' behaviour in lessons stifles the rapid progress needed.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area 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 – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students say they enjoy school. They generally have positive attitudes to learning and their attendance is above average. They get on well in and out of class and generally work and interact together appropriately.

The effectiveness of provision

The leadership has provided appropriate training for staff on the effective use of lesson objectives and their use is now widely seen in lessons. Within departments, a weekly planning sheet is completed by teachers to ensure that staff are clear about what learning should be taking place. Sometimes the use of lesson objectives is not clear enough to identify what learning is required to improve students' knowledge and understanding sufficiently. Overall, recent developments need to be embedded more securely, so that the impact of identifying and sharing clear learning objectives has the intended impact.

The school sets challenging targets for students. They and their teachers are aware of these and this helps students understand how well they are doing and what is expected of them to improve further. However, more is needed to embed into teachers' everyday practice as to how data and information can be used to fine-tune what students learn in lessons, commensurate with their needs and abilities.

In science, design and technology and in some English lessons, students say they are increasingly required to investigate topics for themselves. In two science lessons observed, students were very clear about their roles in different group activities and how they were expected to feed back to their group, independently, information secured by working with others. School leaders have made significant inroads into improving the quality of marking and the feedback students receive, although there are inconsistencies across subjects. While students have been issued with planners, their use is limited. Little work is recorded and staff do not check them frequently enough.

Lessons are now involving students much more actively in their learning. However, there remain too many instances of off-task behaviour, either through chatting or similar distractions, which prevents learning from taking place as well as it could. This, combined with some students' concerns over the discontinuity in their learning because of the staffing issues, means that learning is not always strong enough to ensure students progress well and consistently, over time to make up any shortfalls accrued. While the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last monitoring inspection, and is acknowledged as being key to the improved attainment in some areas, it is not yet strong enough across the school to overcome the legacy of underachievement.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching - good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders, and increasingly middle leaders, are demonstrating a stronger ability in bringing about the necessary improvements. Middle leaders are now more

responsible and accountable for their subject areas and have processes in place to secure improved teaching and learning. While not all departments use, for example, learning walks to measure the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms, a more collegiate approach to supporting one another is evident. Classroom observations are increasingly being undertaken by subject leaders, an example of the devolved skills from senior leaders. Leaders of key subjects are beginning to help drive improvement in their areas of responsibility and there are early signs of this positive influence having impact in other subject areas. Further work is underway to ensure consistent application across all departments of a more meaningful system of planned differentiation to meet the needs of all students. This is also helping to support the emerging, but not yet secure development of students' independent learning skills. Data are provided to subject teachers which are wide-ranging, but in some areas, have minimal effect because they do not show up-to-date levels of attainment that would help teachers plan for individuals and groups more effectively.

Leaders have identified that more needs to be done to address the specific needs of some groups of students. The 'transforming learning group' of teachers is ensuring that best practice is being shared. Opportunities exist for staff to be coached through bespoke professional development after teachers' needs have been identified by the school's leadership. The ongoing staff absence across the school works against ensuring the legacy of students' underachievement is addressed.

The specialism is increasing its impact across the school in supporting other curriculum areas, particularly in Key Stage 3. Staff training and 'active learning days' have helped students and staff understand the benefits of problem-solving techniques. Plans are in place to develop the specialism's impact further. Staff have problem-solving targets built into their performance management reviews; a clear indication of the school's commitment to further ensure that the specialism impacts even more widely across the school. Dialogue between staff is now much more focused on students' progress and there is a willingness of teachers outside of the specialist subjects to become more involved in the specialism to help improve their subject areas.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Increase the rigour with which the school evaluates its own work, particularly the quality of teaching and learning, in order to bring about sustained improvement – good

External support

The level of support from the local authority has reduced over time as the school shows itself to be increasingly capable of standing alone. Support from the School Improvement Partner is well targeted. It continues, but is now less intensive because of the progress the school has made in addressing the issues since being subject to special measures.

Priorities for further improvement

- There are no priorities for further improvement. The school should continue to focus on the areas for improvement identified during the October 2009 inspection.