

CfBT Inspection Services      T 0300 1231231  
Suite 22      [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
West Lancs Investment Centre [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

**Direct T** 01695 566855  
**Direct F** 01695 729320  
[gail.hill@cfbt.com](mailto:gail.hill@cfbt.com)  
[www.cfbt-inspections.com](http://www.cfbt-inspections.com)



Friday 7 October 2011

Mr David Sibbit  
Headteacher  
Netherhall School  
Netherhall Road  
Maryport  
Cumbria  
CA15 6NT

Dear Mr Sibbit,

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Netherhall School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 6 October 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to your deputy headteacher, senior staff and those heads of department who provided valuable information about the focus of our visit.

The school roll has fallen since the inspection in June 2010, and staffing has been reduced as a consequence of this. At the time of the visit there were two members of staff away on maternity leave who had been replaced by teachers on fixed term contracts.

As a result of the inspection on Monday 21 June 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements, and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Students' attainment in national tests at the end of Year 11 and Year 13 improved again this year, continuing a four year trend of improvement for the school. The proportion of students gaining A\*-C grades in their respective examinations increased for students in both year groups. Targets were met or exceeded for the majority of subjects at GCSE, though performance in English dipped from last year's. This continues a pattern of inconsistent performance in the subject, with lower attaining students and some boys continuing to making less good progress than other groups. In mathematics the trend of improving performance continued with results close to average.

Work seen in students' books shows this variation in rates of progress. One sample included some high quality work with evident good progress from students of all abilities in history. In other examples, including those seen during lesson observations, the quality and volume of work varied significantly between groups of different ability, and was sometimes marred by poor presentation and incomplete tasks in the books of lower attaining students,

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This reflects some inconsistency of expectation by both staff and students. A similar pattern exists in the quality of marking and feedback to students on how to improve. Much was helpful and encouraging, and there were some excellent examples which inspired students to do their best. However some marking was cursory, gave little advice on how to improve and failed to challenge students over poor presentation.

Heads of department are taking a stronger lead in identifying weaknesses and planning improvement. While there are inconsistencies between departments in the rigour and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation, it is clear that identified staff are being supported to improve their performance and that staff are more responsive to students who are at risk of under-achieving. This is as a result of more effective use of strategies to tackle students' needs. Heads of department have also taken a lead in sharing expertise and good practice within their departments, so that there is increasing consistency in the quality of teaching and learning within subjects. The sharing of best practice, including inspirational and innovative teaching, has not extended significantly beyond departments yet, though senior leaders see this as the next step in raising the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school.

Teaching and learning are improving, and in the most effective departments there is a significant proportion that is good or outstanding. However, it was evident from the sample that improvements to teachers' use of assessment information are still embedding in some departments. Informal discussions with students confirmed that the level of challenge in lessons can vary significantly from subject to subject, with some lessons 'too easy' and others that, 'really make you think and work hard'. Lesson planning varies in providing opportunities for teachers to assess students' progress during the lesson. In some classes there were good examples of probing questions to challenge students' thinking, assess their progress and take them a step further. In others teachers either did not give students time to extend their answers, or were prepared to accept a brief response which they then amplified for the rest of the class. Other assessment methods are developing. In some lessons students made written assessments of each other's work, which gave them a good foundation for oral feedback to the rest of the class. Again, senior leaders recognise the time is ripe for capturing and sharing this kind of good practice in order to accelerate progress.

A whole school initiative to improve communication skills is beginning to embed. This makes regular provision for 'learning through talk' in Key Stage 3, while the English curriculum is being developed to provide speaking and listening units across Key Stages 3 and 4 in preparation for new GCSE assessments. While some good examples were seen, this is an area where improvements have not had time to show in formal outcomes for students. Opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning are increasing, for example through collaborative activities where students are expected to solve problems. However, there is less evidence of this than of other improvements since the previous inspection, and students still tend to be passive rather than active learners.

The local authority has continued to support the school's improvement well, especially in developing and embedding programmes of learning to promote students' speaking, listening and thinking skills.

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

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick  
**Additional Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place Monday 21 June 2010**

In order to raise students' attainment, the school should increase the effectiveness of teaching by:

- making more effective use of information about students' prior attainment to inform lesson planning so that activities are tailored to students' individual needs;
- ensuring that all teachers systematically check on the extent of students' learning and progress in lessons;
- increasing opportunities in all lessons for students to develop their speaking and listening skills;
- providing more opportunities in lessons for students to take responsibility for their own learning and demonstrate creativity;
- ensuring that the best practice in inspirational and innovative teaching is shared more widely.