

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566932
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: hcarnall@cfbt.com



5 December 2013

Mrs Maryssa O'Connor
Principal
Thornaby Academy
Baysdale Road
Thornaby
Stockton-on-Tees
TS17 9DB

Dear Mrs O'Connor

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Thornaby Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 4 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director Children Education and Social Care, Stockton-on-Tees.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is at least good by:
 - making sure that teachers use assessment information consistently and precisely to meet the identified learning needs of all students
 - making sure that teachers provide regular opportunities for students to take an active part in lessons, so they are involved in collaborative and practical activities and develop their ability to work independently
 - improving students' enthusiasm for learning through more frequent and varied ways to develop their verbal and thinking skills, and confidence, for example, through paired talk, group discussion and class debate
 - ensuring that the marking of students' work, in all subjects, provides clear feedback about how well they have done and what is required to improve.

- Raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics, and ensure that all students make progress which at least matches national expectations at Key Stage 4 by:
 - raising teachers expectations of students' capabilities and ensuring that the targets for students at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are sufficiently clear and ambitious
 - using the academy's new assessment regime effectively to make certain that students' progress towards challenging targets is monitored rigorously and actions taken systematically to tackle gaps in students' knowledge, skills and understanding.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers by:
 - equipping all those in leadership positions with the skills and knowledge necessary to accurately monitor the staff's performance so that feedback is of a consistently high quality
 - ensuring that effective leadership of mathematics brings about rapid improvement in teaching and learning so that standards rise quickly and students make at least good progress
 - rigorously using performance management to secure good teaching and leadership.

- Continue the academy's efforts to reduce persistent absence further and improve attendance amongst all groups of students.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4 December 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the Principal, a group of students, The Chair of the Governing Body, senior leaders and other staff. The inspector observed teaching accompanied by a senior leader and scrutinised documents including the academy's progress information.

Context

The academy moved to the new building in June 2013. A new director for mathematics took up post on a part-time basis in April and full-time from June. A further eight teachers have also been appointed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Principal along with senior leaders and governors remain steadfast in their work to transform the academy. They have maintained their high expectations of teachers, students and themselves. Their evaluations of the work of the academy are unflinching and candid. The move to the new building has been used well to re-emphasise the focus on high quality teaching. The new building has had a marked and highly positive impact on the morale of both staff and students. Leaders have been quick to make the point to both staff and students that the excellent resources and learning spaces leave no room for excuses for poor performance.

The academy is now fully staffed and students speak positively about having the same teacher each lesson. New teachers have settled in quickly and students say they have to work hard in most lessons. However, they notice a difference across different subject areas. Students' views of mathematics are now positive and they say this is an area where they have noticed a big improvement. 'The teachers explain things really well, I get it now', was the comment from one student. This is in marked contrast to students' comments in previous monitoring visits.

The programmes to support teachers in improving their work described in the last monitoring report are now well established. Teachers value the support they get and try new ideas they have learned about in training. For example, teachers recently attended some Teach Meet training. This was a series of small workshops designed to meet teachers' specific needs. After the training teachers highlighted the things they were going to do differently, including improving their questioning skills.

The improving leadership in mathematics and English is bringing about better results and over half the students in Year 11 gained five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, in the summer. However, this is inconsistent and some subject areas, such as French, are not improving quickly enough. This is partly because they have not had the same level of scrutiny from senior leaders. The academy knows this and leaders have turned their exacting gaze to include all subject areas.

A number of new governors have been appointed, including a new Chair of Governors. This has led to a renewed vigour in the work of this group. Monitoring is sharper and governors have been quick to challenge where improvements are not moving quickly enough. For example, governors have linked with subject areas and have challenged leaders to improve the monitoring of subjects such as art and history. The governors have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and remaining weaknesses and they are rapidly developing an ambitious appetite for rapid change.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Students' achievement continues to improve because of the systematic improvements in teaching. The questions teachers ask students are more consistently challenging and make students think hard.
- Students say improvements in teaching and behaviour are obvious but not completely consistent. They particularly enjoy solving practical problems in small groups and pairs and this is happening much more frequently.
- Students' attendance has improved and it is now much closer to the national average. The numbers of students who are persistently absent has reduced but remains too high. Leaders have forged effective partnerships with other agencies and, as a result, students who were rarely attending school are beginning to attend more often.
- Rates of exclusions have been significantly reduced because leaders have helped teachers to improve the way they manage poor behaviour. However, there are still too many students who are excluded. Students who are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding and those with special educational needs are more likely to be excluded than other groups of students.
- Teachers' marking continues to improve and students consistently get helpful comments about their work explaining what they have done well and how they could improve. These comments are sometimes of a very high quality but this is not consistent across the academy. Occasionally, students have the opportunity to respond to what their teacher has written and the academy is working to ensure this happens regularly.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Overall improvements in students' achievement mask the wide gaps that remain between the progress made by different groups of students, particularly the most-able, those who are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium funding and those with special educational needs. These gaps are closing securely, especially in Key Stage 3. Nevertheless, this remains a concern.
- There are occasions when learning support assistants offer students help too readily and this slows their progress. However, on the whole, students are becoming more independent and better prepared to keep trying even when the work is hard.
- The proportion of students in Year 11 who made the progress expected of them in mathematics last year was lower than the academy's predictions. Leaders have taken swift action to have the accuracy of teachers' marking and assessments checked by external partners. Improvements have gathered pace since the appointment of the new director of mathematics and other teachers.

- Teachers in English and mathematics are becoming skilled in using progress checks to plan work that meets the needs of all groups of students but this is not happening in every subject.

External support

The academy continues to make effective use of external partners. For example, leaders have worked with a partner school to improve the systems to manage students' behaviour and attendance. Following this work, leaders have improved their analysis of the information they have about students' attendance and behaviour. Consequently, there have been significant improvements in both of these aspects.