

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

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566855
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
gail.hill@cfbt.com



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Ms Alexis Widdowson
Headteacher
Berwick Academy
Adams Drive
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Northumberland
TD15 2JF

Dear Ms Widdowson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Berwick Academy, Northumberland

Following my visit to your academy on 6 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

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

Academy leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning, and the Chair of the Education Committee of the Governing Body. I reviewed a range of documents including the academy's improvement plan, the headteacher's reports to governors, proposals to revise the sixth form curriculum, analyses of student achievement and strategies to monitor and improve the quality of teaching.

Context

There have been no changes since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

The headteacher and governing body have a secure understanding of what needs to be done. They have acted swiftly and taken decisive action to develop and implement their plan to tackle the areas for improvement identified in the October inspection. Common systems to monitor and track students' progress have been developed and are beginning to provide information that helps to improve teachers' ability to pitch activities at the right level for individual students and to raise expectations about what students can achieve. More frequent monitoring of teaching by the headteacher is giving a clearer indication of the quality of teaching. A structured programme of training and support for teachers has begun.

Governors are committed to making a difference to the academy and demonstrate their clear intent to do so through the recent training, review and skills audit they have undertaken. Regular visits and incisive reports provided by the headteacher to governors have resulted in a secure understanding of what is going on in the academy. This has improved the governors' ability to hold the headteacher and staff to account for the impact of their work.

The headteacher and governors have reflected carefully on the structure of the current senior leadership team. As a result, staff are currently being consulted about proposals to revise the leadership structure in order to secure the increased capacity and capability to drive improvements quickly and sustain them over the longer term.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has been slow to respond to the findings of the recent inspection and has not yet brokered any support for the academy. Governors recognise that given the isolated location of the school it is a challenge to forge appropriate partnerships locally. Nonetheless, it is imperative that the right external support is secured for the academy as soon as possible, not least because there is a pressing need to boost the capacity of the senior leadership team over the short term until a new structure is in place. This is necessary to sustain the momentum generated since the section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley

Her Majesty's Inspector