

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



12 December 2013

Mrs Linda Rodham
Headteacher
Wellfield Community School A Specialist Maths and Computing College
North Road East
Wingate
County Durham
TS28 5AX

Dear Mrs Rodham

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Wellfield Community School - A Specialist Maths and Computing College

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 school's most recent monitoring inspection.

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

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time, the school 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, the Director of Children's Services for Durham and as below.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or better by:
 - rapidly eliminating all inadequate teaching
 - improving the quality of all teaching to be at least good by the end of the school year
 - sharing the good practice that exists in the school so that weaker teachers learn from the most successful practitioners
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what students can do and that they require them to work hard in lessons
 - improving teachers' use of assessment information and assessment methods during lessons so that all students are able to make good progress
 - ensuring that teachers provide more frequent opportunities for active and independent learning so that students learn at their own best rate
 - ensuring that the planning, resources and support provided for students who have special educational needs are tailored to match their capabilities and specific needs so that they enjoy learning and make the same progress as their peers
 - continuing to secure consistently good behaviour in lessons through close monitoring of students' views on learning in different subjects and taking action where it is needed.

- Raise students' attainment and achievement, especially in English and mathematics by:
 - accelerating progress in Key Stage 3 so that students are well prepared for the challenges of GCSE work
 - ensuring that work in these subjects is well matched to the needs of individuals in all classes, so that they make the progress of which they are capable and are not held back by expectations that are too low.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills and expertise of middle leaders to robustly and accurately monitor the performance of staff and students in their departments and take prompt and effective action to tackle weaknesses
 - identifying, analysing and collating the best practice in departments from which to develop consistent good practice
 - improving governors' first-hand knowledge of the school so they are able to hold it more fully to account and play a more effective role in the school's strategic development.

- Raise the attendance of the large groups of persistent absentees by continuing to develop ways of engaging these students in successful and enjoyable learning.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11 December 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff, a group of students, two governors and a representative of the local authority. The inspector observed lessons accompanied by senior leaders and looked at school documents, including progress information.

Context

The school has moved into part of the new building and is due to move into a further phase of the premises in February 2014. Since the previous monitoring inspection, three teachers have been appointed and seven have left the school. One member of staff is on a long-term leave of absence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders remain focussed on bringing about rapid improvement. The results in the summer of 2013 for Year 11 were significantly better than in previous years. Many more students made the progress expected of them and an increasing number made good progress. This is because teaching is improving. Many older students still have gaps in their learning because of previously inadequate teaching. The headteacher, effectively supported by the senior leaders, have put in place a range of activities, including small group work, to make sure the students catch up quickly and this has paid dividends. Leaders are planning to reduce the amount of these activities as teaching and learning improves. However, the work to identify students with special educational needs is not accurate and remains a weakness.

Middle leaders are becoming increasingly confident in spotting how well students are doing and taking effective action where students are at risk of underachievement. They have adopted the high expectations and tenacity of the determined headteacher.

The teaching and learning groups are being used well by leaders to make sure teachers share the good practice in the school. Teachers are keen to improve their work. They listen and respond readily to advice and training. For example, 14 teachers in one of the Teaching and Learning Groups gave up a weekend to attend a residential course about how to meet the needs of different groups of students. Consequently, teachers' planning now identifies these groups. However, there is still work to be done to ensure teachers plan to meet the needs of individual students rather than three broad ability ranges.

The governing body has continued to develop its work. Governors have a sharp focus on the progress made by different groups of students. They offer leaders a good level of challenge because they make sure they have accurate information. For example, at governors' request, leaders have improved the quality of the information they give to governors about students' progress so that it is clear to see how the school are doing against the national picture. Governors have an accurate understanding of how pupil premium funding is being used and keep a careful eye on how it is improving the achievement, behaviour and attendance of those students.

The move to part of the new building has been used to good effect. All the staff and students are making good use of the better resources and environment to re-focus their efforts to improve learning. The move to the new building was marked with a smart new uniform for students which they wear with pride.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- A key strength in the school's approach is senior and middle leaders' unrelenting focus on improving teaching. Consequently, achievement is improving rapidly. Last term the number of Year 11 students achieving five good grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was very close to the national average for the first time in many years. This improvement was accurately predicted by senior and middle leaders. Progress in Key Stage 3 is also gathering pace. Students say teachers' written comments on their work help them a great deal. In the best examples, teachers tell students what they have done well and suggest exactly what they could do to improve. However, students also say some teachers' marking is better and more regular than others.
- Students say teachers nearly always expect them to work hard but there remains a small amount of variation across different subject areas.
- Leaders and teachers have made a concerted effort to improve students' behaviour. Staff and students are as one voice in acknowledging significant improvements. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been dramatically reduced. Students say poor behaviour is rare and confined to off-task chatter in particular lessons. The new building is an oasis of calm as students move around the building sensibly and make the most of the open, airy and well-resourced space.
- Students' attendance is also improving quickly and it is now in line with the national average. Leaders are aware that students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium and those who need extra help in class still do not attend as well as other groups of students. However, this disparity is also reducing. Staff have been successful in reducing the number of students who are persistently absent by their continuing work with individual students and their families to overcome some difficult problems.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The overall improvement in achievement is still not uniform for all groups of students. Those known to be eligible for the pupil premium and those who have special educational needs do not do as well as other groups. However, these gaps are closing quickly. In some subjects, such as information and communication technology and physics, more-able students do not do as well as others and the numbers who achieve the highest grades at GCSE lag behind those found nationally.
- The school does not have an accurate system to identify students who have special educational needs in Key Stage Three. Consequently, students who have gaps in their learning because of previously inadequate teaching are wrongly identified as having a special educational need. This prevents specialist staff from having a precise understanding of the progress of those students who do have a genuine special educational need. The school's senior leader for this aspect has not been trained to the appropriate level and this is a significant weakness. The school are acutely aware of the need to take urgent and immediate action to put this right.

External support

The school continue to make effective use of external support from the local authority. The headteacher has particularly valued the support in solving some difficult staffing issues. The local authority has quite rightly reduced the level of support as the school becomes increasingly effective.