

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancashire Investment
Centre
Maple View
White Moss Business Park
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566868
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: pnuttie@cftb.com

17 January 2014

Mrs S Hare
Executive Principal
Eston Park Academy
Burns Road
Middlesbrough
Cleveland
TS6 9AW

Dear Mrs Hare

Special measures monitoring inspection of Eston Park Academy

Following my visit with Phil Smith, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Peter Harrison, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 15 and 16 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that that the academy may appoint Newly Qualified Teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Redcar and Cleveland.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Keeler
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good, particularly in English, humanities and languages, in order that students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those studying vocational subjects in the sixth form, make good or better progress, by:
 - ensuring that teachers routinely use assessment information to plan work which challenges all students at the right level
 - raising teachers' expectations of how much students can achieve in every lesson and during registration times
 - increasing the variety and pace of activities so that students are interested and engaged throughout lessons and during registration periods in order that students do not lose interest or cause disruption to the learning of others
 - providing students with regular, high quality written feedback so they know how to do better next time.

- Urgently strengthen leadership and management at all levels in order to bring about the necessary improvements in teaching and students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that no teaching is inadequate
 - involving all leaders and managers in regularly checking the quality of teaching, including the marking of students' work
 - ensuring that teachers are held to account for the impact of their teaching on students' achievement
 - identifying the training needs of teachers and providing high quality training to improve their skills
 - sharing the strengths of the good and outstanding teaching that exists in the academy more widely to help other teachers to improve their practice.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 January 2014

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the Executive Principal, vice-principal/head of academy, the senior leaders responsible for teaching and learning and two representatives of the sponsor. Discussions also took place with representatives of the governing body, the academy school improvement adviser and a group of students. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including the academy's analysis of students' current attainment and progress, records of monitoring the quality of teaching undertaken by senior leaders and the minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Eston Park is due to amalgamate with the neighbouring Gillbrook Academy in September 2014. A joint governing body is in place to prepare for the transition. An Executive Principal Designate has been appointed to lead the new academy and took up his appointment on January 1 2014. The current Executive Principal who commenced in September 2013 will lead the academy until the end of the current academic year. Since Easter 2013, 46 staff have left out of a total establishment of 72. The demands of special measures combined with unresolved issues related to staffing prior to the amalgamation of the two academies are making the retention and recruitment of staff extremely challenging.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The percentage of students attaining five A* to C grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, rose significantly in 2012/13. This was due to an intense programme of late-targeted intervention work with the then Year 11 students. Senior leaders have a good track record of accurately predicting student attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. This is as a result of effective mechanisms that enable staff to track students' progress carefully over time. An analysis of academy data combined with students' performance observed during lessons by inspectors indicate that this trend of improvement is on track to be maintained. The current academic year will again involve targeted intervention. However, unlike the previous year, students will also benefit from the improved quality of teaching. This is a significant step forward.

Students in Years 7 to 9 are making better progress in the core subjects of English and mathematics than at the time of the previous inspection. The gap in performance between those students known to be eligible for free school meals and their non-eligible peers is beginning to narrow. This also applies to the gap in attainment between disabled students and those with special educational needs and students nationally. Students studying vocational subjects in the sixth form are making better progress because expectations of what they are capable of achieving

have been raised. This is reflected in changes to students' performance targets which are much more challenging. However, there is still a long way to go if students are to achieve their potential.

Students' achievement in the non-core subjects is a concern, particularly in humanities where leadership and teaching require considerable improvement. The senior leadership team is acutely aware of this and plans are in hand to address the situation. However, changes need to take place without delay if students are to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to prepare them for their next stage in education, training or employment.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving with more of it good and outstanding than there was at the time of the previous inspection. This is because improving the quality of teaching and learning is a priority set by the senior leadership team. The two senior leaders charged with the responsibility of securing improvements in teaching are beginning to make a notable difference and this is why students are starting to make better progress. However, even though teaching is improving overall, the individual performance of too many teachers still requires improvement. Senior leaders have also identified a notable number of staff whose performance is regarded as inadequate. These teachers are being given considerable advice, coaching and support. Some are responding well and doing their utmost to improve. However, this is not always the case. Notable features of teaching that were observed during the visit included: higher expectations of what students are capable of achieving, particularly in English; teachers' good subject knowledge evident in responses to questions and in explanations of the subject matter; and students actively involved in lessons through lively debate and well-planned discussions which enhance their understanding. Marking has improved and the academy policy is, in the main, closely adhered to. All of the above represent significant steps forward. The use of assessment to ensure that work is suitably challenging requires further improvement.

The legacy of ineffective teaching over time has resulted in many students having gaps in skills and knowledge. As a result, many teachers, particularly in the non-core subjects, are still struggling to plan lessons that cater effectively for differing levels of ability. As a consequence, expectations, especially for the most able students, are too low and this inhibits progress. Teachers in English and mathematics are better at ensuring that students make progress during lessons because they are more adept at identifying their misconceptions and taking swift action to address them.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of students was not identified as an area requiring improvement at the previous inspection. However, the report did include references to restlessness leading to misbehaviour which disrupted the learning of others in the class. During the inspection there were no instances of misbehaviour observed during lessons. On

the contrary, students were on task, listened attentively and applied themselves to their work. Students commented that expectations of students' behaviour and attitudes have improved over the past five months mainly due to teachers abiding by agreed policies and procedures. They also indicated that teaching had improved and that the feedback they received to help them improve was regular and informative.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Executive Principal has been in post since the beginning of the autumn term only but has clearly made inroads into improving the quality of teaching and learning and in ensuring that the senior leadership team is able to bring about the necessary changes. A positive start has been made but there remains much to do.

Teachers are now held to account for students' progress. Performance management is now in place and includes individual targets in relation to the quality of teaching. The target set to eradicate inadequate teaching before the new academy is in place is possible, but will require a swifter and more rigorous approach. The senior leaders responsible for improving teaching are working hard and there is evidence of better provision. They understand what good teaching entails and are facilitating appropriate support where required. However, the proportion of good teaching needs to rise further and there is too much variability within faculties. These key personnel cannot do it alone and increased collective responsibility is required within the leadership team if good teaching is to become the norm. The weaknesses within the humanities faculty where there is no current permanent leadership and too much teaching that is either requiring improvement or inadequate need to be tackled as a matter of urgency. Faculty leaders in English and mathematics are now playing their part in raising the quality of teaching. They demonstrate what good teaching means and monitor provision within the faculty on a regular basis. This way of working is not well-established in all faculties. These subject/faculty leaders are key players if improvement is to be realised across the board and their development is a priority.

The Executive Principal Designate of the new academy took up his position at the beginning of the spring term. Although he is not directly responsible for the day-to-day organisation of Eston Park, his appointment does represent a valuable opportunity to become more involved in the decision making in respect of key policies that will have an impact on both students and staff when the new academy is opened in September 2014. His skills and expertise could be better employed during this transition period to help tackle the weaknesses at Eston Park because this academy's effectiveness at the point of amalgamation will undoubtedly have an impact on the success of the new academy.

The governing body is prepared to challenge the academy leaders. They have a clear understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Members receive regular updates on improvement issues in the academy but now need to see for themselves how the initiatives outlined in the improvement plan are making a difference to students' learning.

External support

The sponsor is supporting the academy's improvement and the development of leadership capacity well. The deployment of senior leaders to oversee the development of teaching is proving to be effective and this in turn is beginning to accelerate students' progress. By securing the services of an academy improvement adviser, worthwhile support has also been provided for leaders at all levels and teaching staff in particular.