

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelsmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com



24 October 2014

Mrs Sandy Todd
Headteacher
Southfield Technology College
Moorclose Road
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 5BH

Dear Mrs Todd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southfield Technology College

Following my visit with Peter McKay, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 October 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, but should consult with me first.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise the quality of teaching in order to accelerate progress and raise standards, particularly for boys, more-able students and all students in English, by:
 - making sure teachers adapt their teaching so that all students are engaged and interested in the work they are given
 - increasing the level of stretch and challenge in lessons so that the more-able students make good or better progress
 - ensuring teachers across all subjects develop students' literacy skills by correcting spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes
 - giving students opportunities to act on the guidance they are given to improve their work and checking up to see they have followed such advice.
- Make sure attendance improves at a faster rate by:
 - exploring effective practice to raise attendance used by other schools
 - enlisting the support of all parents, carers and students more effectively
- Improve achievement in the sixth form by tackling areas of underperformance and also by increasing the proportion of students gaining the top grades in examinations.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - raising expectations by making targets more challenging throughout the school and thereby raising achievement
 - refining the school development plan so that key actions are more precisely focused on areas of underperformance
 - working with external partners to secure the financial stability of the school in the short and medium term
 - undertaking an external review of governance to make sure governors have a realistic view regarding the school's performance and challenge the school more effectively to raise standards.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22 – 23 October 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the interim headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and other staff. They met with a group of students and spoke to many more during lessons and break times. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB).

Context

Southfield Technology College and Stainburn School and Science College are due to close and will be replaced by a new academy in September 2015. Since the last monitoring inspection, the sponsorship of the new academy has been confirmed as William Howard Trust. Funding has been secured for a new building which is scheduled to open in January 2017.

The leadership team has been reorganised to make the best use of expertise across both schools. Two new assistant headteachers have been appointed. Eleven teachers have left the school and 13 have been appointed, including two newly qualified teachers and two who are part time. Some are on temporary contracts. There are currently four supply teachers covering long-term absences. Two higher level teaching assistants will be appointed to support mathematics and English. Many teachers teach across Southfield and Stainburn schools.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students in the 2014 Year 11 cohort made faster progress in the few months before their examinations, due to effective support initiated by the new leadership team. However, there was not sufficient time to fill the gaps in their learning left by previously inadequate teaching and curriculum planning. This cohort entered the school in Year 7 with achievement that was significantly below average. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, including English and mathematics was well below average. In mathematics, middle-ability students did not make expected progress from their prior attainment at Key Stage 2. In English, it was the lower-ability students who did not make enough progress. The gap widened between disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding) and others in school. Several other subjects suffered from disrupted teaching and poor planning for progression in knowledge and skills at Key Stage 3.

Senior leaders have reorganised teaching and changed schemes of work appropriately, in order to quicken students' progress. Students are making faster progress at Key Stage 3 now, because knowledge and skills are being taught more

systematically in each subject. At Key Stage 4, improvements to teaching and better planning for examinations are beginning to raise achievement. Students receive more detailed information and relevant advice and guidance to help them make the right choice of courses. Leaders are tracking the progress of students in Years 10 and 11 carefully to make sure they are on track to achieve their target grades and receive appropriate support if they fall behind.

In the sixth form a higher proportion of students attained at the higher A* to B grades in 2014 than has previously been the case. This is a move in the right direction, but there is still further work to be done to make sure all students make good progress and achieve the higher grades they are capable of.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved with the provision of well-targeted professional development that teachers describe as 'inspirational'. It has also been strengthened by several new appointments and the sharing of expertise across the two schools. Teachers have a better understanding of the levels students should be working at in each year group, so that they plan work that is more closely matched to students' learning needs.

Students make the most rapid progress when teachers explain new ideas very clearly and tasks support learning effectively. In philosophy and ethics, for example, full explanation and skilful questioning enabled students to write a reasoned and well-structured essay explaining different views on euthanasia. In sport science, students were able to design their own fitness routines, because they had a good understanding of the impact of different exercises. However, there are still occasions when students' progress is too slow because they are rushed through activities that occupy them, but do not extend their learning. Teachers' questioning does not always help students deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Marking is regular and mostly provides students with useful feedback, but there is still variability in impact. Teachers are paying more attention to spelling and punctuation, which is helpful. Where marking is most effective, in mathematics for example, it corrects misunderstandings, adds to students' knowledge and extends their skills. Some marking is not precise enough to bring about improvements to work or quicken progress. Peer- and self-marking is used most successfully when students have a good understanding of the success criteria for the piece of work they are commenting on. This is not always the case, however, and there are occasions when students leave lessons without a clear understanding of what a good piece of work looks like.

Teaching in the sixth form is improving, but is not yet equipping students to achieve at the higher grades in all subjects. Students do very well in vocational subjects but

less well in more academic subjects. Senior leaders have appropriate plans to improve teaching and quicken progress where needed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are better behaved in lessons because leaders have set clear expectations and teachers are engaging students in learning more successfully. Students are cooperative; they stay on task and respond to direction. Students are beginning to talk about what they have learnt, but often lack skills to contribute confidently to discussion in lessons, for example, by explaining their own ideas or building on or challenging the ideas of others. Such speaking skills are not developed well enough in all subjects. Leaders have introduced a new initiative to develop students' responsibility for learning focusing on organisational skills, engagement and attitudes. Although it is too early to see impact, the initiative is helpful in ensuring that such skills are encouraged.

Behaviour around the school continues to improve. Students say the school is friendly and staff are approachable and helpful. They have a reasonable understanding of different types of bullying and say bullying happens rarely in school now. Attendance has improved for all student groups, including those eligible for pupil premium. There are more robust procedures to follow up absence and support families at risk of low attendance, as well as to reward good attendance.

Attendance in the sixth form has also improved. Sixth-form students are motivated to do well and have positive attitudes to learning. They provide good role models for younger students, although they have limited opportunities to develop their own leadership skills.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher continues to provide strong strategic leadership and is supported well by the IEB. Strategic leaders have strengthened capacity in leadership at all levels further, by using expertise from Southfield and Stainburn Schools across both schools and through new appointments. The interim headteacher, deputy headteacher and the new senior leadership team provide strong direction and have the respect and trust of staff. Senior leaders have established clear lines of accountability and targets for performance, so everyone knows what is expected of them. There are detailed systems to check students' achievement so that students at risk of falling behind are appropriately supported to catch up.

Systems to check the quality and impact of teaching are more robust. Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and there are effective plans to improve teaching, where needed. The newly qualified teachers are being supported well by mentors in school and with additional support from the Queen Katherine Teaching

School Alliance. Staff say they feel 'enabled and empowered' as their skills have grown and they are able to use their initiative. They have a realistic view of what needs to improve and morale is high.

A core team of middle leaders provides increasingly effective leadership. They know exactly what is expected, have a good understanding of performance in their areas and have sharply focused plans for improvement. Senior leaders have made a number of key appointments to strengthen the learning culture of the school. The new directors of learning, for example, have oversight of behaviour and achievement so that they can track patterns and provide appropriate support. There is still a way to go to make sure leadership is as effective in all subjects, but the strong role models and plans for further professional development in leadership skills provide a secure foundation for further improvement.

The IEB provides strong strategic leadership across Southfield and Stainburn schools. They have a thorough understanding of the school's performance and of the improvements needed. The impact of pupil premium spending has rightly been identified as a key concern and is being closely checked this year. The IEB provides effective challenge and support to make sure students achieve as well as possible, while making sure that plans for the new academy proceed smoothly.

External support

The local authority has supported the school well in the commissioning of high quality external support and in securing the support of the executive headteacher and the interim headteacher. Close working with Stainburn School and Science College makes the best use of expertise in each school, to the advantage of all students. The close partnership with William Howard School is also building capacity within the leadership team and supporting the sharing of best practice. Partnership working through the Cumbria Association of System Leaders provides benefits for all schools.