

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

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



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Mr Will Carpenter
Executive Headteacher
High Well School - South Hiendley
High Well Hill Lane
South Hiendley
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S72 9DF

Dear Mr Carpenter

Special measures monitoring inspection of High Well School - South Hiendley

Following my visit to your school with Joan Hewitt, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 12 and 13 November 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next inspection.

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 Corporate Director, Children and Young People for Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching to be consistently good or better in order to raise achievement rapidly across all year groups, by:
 - developing teachers' knowledge and skills so that in all subjects they plan their lessons using methods that engage, challenge and give all students the scope to take charge of their own learning and the motivation to work hard
 - raising teachers' expectations in relation to students' behaviour, their cooperation and positive contribution to lessons
 - increasing the pace of learning and ensuring students are encouraged to read and write often and have good opportunities in mathematics to improve their skills in number, calculation and problem-solving
 - making the assessment of students' starting points and progress consistent in rigour and accuracy across the school
 - ensuring teachers use assessments to plan work for students that is precisely matched to their level of attainment and build systematically on what students already know and can do.

- Improve students' behaviour and attendance, by:
 - ensuring that all staff develop the insights and skills to manage students' behaviour with consistency and to good effect
 - reducing significantly the high level of exclusions prompted by students' unacceptable behaviour
 - redoubling efforts to reduce the high level of absence through the work of the family support adviser and the school's incentives to encourage good attendance.

- Improve leadership and the capacity to improve the school, by:
 - developing and implementing a comprehensive scheme of rigorous checks on the school's work especially in relation to teaching and students' outcomes
 - improving leaders' skills in observing and evaluating the quality of teaching so that they give teachers clear feedback on their areas for improvement
 - strengthening the part played by teachers' performance management and their professional development in improving teaching
 - ensuring the tracking of students' progress is accurate and clear in showing which students make expected progress and which make less or more than this, leading to an accurate judgement on the school's effectiveness in promoting good achievement
 - making more effective use of pupil premium funding
 - reviewing the curriculum and amending it as necessary to ensure it offers good opportunities for literacy and numeracy in all subjects.

- Improve governance by:
 - making sure governors are given comprehensive reports and accurate evaluations of the school's work so that they can challenge leaders effectively and set them clear expectations that will lead to improvement.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work both on the main site and at the Year 11 Knottingley centre. They scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the teacher in charge of the Knottingley centre, the staff with responsibility for inclusion, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spoke informally to students.

Context

Three teachers took up post at the beginning of this term. Plans to move the school to a new site from September 2015 have been agreed and work is underway to prepare and equip the building.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In 2014, the achievement of Year 11 students improved compared with 2013. However, it remained weak in English where only three of eight students gained any accreditation. Performance was better in mathematics with three students achieving GCSEs at grades D and E and three more gaining accreditation at entry level 3. In science, four students gained GCSEs at grades E and F while a further two reached entry level 3. Students also gained accreditation in information and communication technology, physical education, art and employability skills. All but one of these students have moved on to college courses, training or employment.

The school's most recent progress data show that the majority of students are on track to reach their end-of-year targets. Although well-below average overall because of the barriers to learning presented by students' needs, attainment is rising as a result of the school's drive to increase the range and level of accreditation gained. The aim is for students to reach level 1 and, wherever possible, above this. Currently, two thirds of Year 11 students have achieved entry level 3 in English, a marked improvement on previous years. All have a qualification at this level in mathematics. The school expects half of this cohort to gain functional skills qualifications at level 1 in both English and mathematics as well as entry level qualifications in science. All Year 10 students, and the majority of those in Year 9, have already achieved an entry level 3 qualification in mathematics.

Although the tracking of students' progress gives a positive picture, evidence of their learning in books is patchy. It is fullest for younger students and for the eldest students whose learning is evident in the units of accreditation they are completing. Senior leaders recognise that much more consistency is required in capturing evidence of students' learning including through the recording of work.

The main focus of the school's reward system is now learning. Students continue to be rewarded for improvements in attendance and behaviour but much more emphasis is placed, for instance in assemblies, on rewarding academic achievements. Year 11 students are motivated by the opportunity to earn financial rewards which can be spent via a large online retailer. Much higher amounts can be earned for completing an accredited unit of work than for any other achievement.

The quality of teaching

Although there have been some improvements, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain as new teachers get to know students and adapt to the high levels of their needs. Work is not always pitched at the right level because full account is not taken of the knowledge and skills students already have. At times teachers' subject knowledge is weak so learning is not built up incrementally. The appropriate vocabulary is not introduced and explained to provide a firm basis for learning. When students are enthusiastic about a topic, opportunities are missed to capitalise on this by encouraging them to explore the theme independently. Teachers are too ready to give information rather than letting students investigate for themselves.

Where learning is more successful, good relationships underpin effective management of learning and behaviour. Students' attitudes to learning are positive and good presentation shows how proud they are of their work. Well-chosen resources help to hook students into learning. For instance, younger students were engaged by a short cartoon film about the First World War, which built well on previous work about Armistice Day. Tasks are carefully matched to the needs of each student and resources, such as computer programmes, are used to good effect to support students whose writing skills are limited.

Implementation of the school's marking policy is uneven. At its best, marking is clear and appropriate to students' reading ages. Students are given time to respond to challenges teachers set in their marking and this is just beginning to happen. Some marking is too complex for students to read and respond to.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school is gradually developing its range of therapeutic approaches to meeting students' needs. One-page profiles for each student, which summarise their personal development and behavioural issues, as well as how to respond to these needs, are a positive development. For instance, new staff are using these to help them understand the triggers for individual students so that they can meet students' needs more effectively. Following training, nurturing talk has been introduced as an intervention for those students who require additional help. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this initiative.

Staff are alert to bullying and senior leaders give careful consideration to groupings of students to minimise the opportunities for any intimidation. One-to-one tuition at home or in community venues is being used increasingly, both to keep students who refuse to come to school engaged in learning, but also to remove those whose bullying behaviour is detrimental to the well-being and progress of other students. The impact of such decisions is monitored regularly.

Overall, there is a reduction in exclusions. A spike in exclusions at the beginning of this academic year reflected the challenges of transition for several new students. While the overall figure for attendance has changed little, there have been some improvements for individual students, for example from 11% to 56%. Each student has an individual attendance target which is displayed prominently in their tutor room, as is their progress towards this. Attendance issues for individual students and their families are analysed carefully and support provided both from within the school and in conjunction with other agencies. Where appropriate, challenge to families is robust.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher's clear vision for the school's future is coming into sharper focus as the strategic decisions and plans to relocate the school into a more suitable building get closer to realisation. The school's key systems, for example to assess and track students' progress, are now in place. The development of a suitable curriculum is well underway. Achievements so far this year indicate that the model used with Year 11 students is effective. They spend half of each day on academic tasks linked to accreditation, working with individual support for shorter or longer periods of time depending on their levels of concentration and persistence. For the remainder of the time they participate in a range of off-site activities, including sports, designed to promote their personal development.

Following a trial last year, the curriculum for Years 7 and 8 follows topics into which a number of subjects are integrated. Students are taught by a limited number of staff in a model which is similar to that found in primary schools. Initial signs are that this is effective in helping new students to settle in and in helping all to improve their achievement.

A new approach to improving students' literacy skills is being introduced with the intention that support is integrated into other learning rather than provided as discrete interventions. Training in teaching phonics (the links between sounds and letters) is due to be delivered to both teachers and support staff as part of this initiative, which also includes improving students' comprehension alongside their technical reading skills.

A wide range of trips, visits and visitors contribute to students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development and help them gain an understanding of British

values. For example, during the inspection students spent half a day with the Marines finding out about careers and participating in some physical challenges. A recent residential included physical and social activities as well as providing opportunities for older students to exercise some leadership. However, the school does not track these activities or evaluate their impact for individual students. There is no overview of how personal, social, health and citizenship education contributes to meeting the behavioural, social and emotional needs of students.

The governing body continues to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders. However, this is not always captured in the minutes of meetings. Governors are well informed about the school's progress, both through reports from senior leaders and through the focused visits they make to the school. Governors value the support they have begun to receive from a National Leader in Governance.

External support

The majority of support for improvement comes through school-to-school links with the pupil referral units which the headteacher also leads. Changes of staff mean that the benefits of much support in the summer term have been lost. This term a range of tailored support is being provided for individual teachers in areas such as moderating assessments, external accreditation and literacy. The local authority's School Improvement Officer provides astute and rigorous support for senior leaders in evaluations of the school's progress.