

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 01695 566932

**Direct F** 01695 729320

**Direct email:** hcarnall@cftb.com



21 November 2014

Mr Nigel Dawson  
Headteacher  
Fearn Community Sports College  
Fearn Moss  
Stacksteads  
Bacup  
Lancashire  
OL13 0TG

Dear Mr Dawson

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Fearn Community Sports College**

Following my visit with Peter McKay, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19 and 20 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2014. 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 monitoring 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 Interim Executive Director for Children and Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2014**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics, so that it is at least consistently good across the college by:
  - making sure that teachers use the information they have on students' capability and progress to raise expectations, plan activities to meet their needs, fire their enthusiasm and give purpose to their learning
  - ensuring that teachers check students' understanding before they move on to the next activity, thereby making sure that the pace of teaching matches the pace of students' learning
  - develop teachers' questioning skills so that students are made to think hard about their learning, deepen their understanding and provide extended answers in order to develop their speaking and listening skills
  - making sure that all subjects, as appropriate, make an effective contribution to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills
  - bringing all marking in the college up to the standard of the best; making sure all teachers mark students' work regularly, that the feedback they give is effective in accelerating students' progress and provides a reliable indicator of students' achievement.
- Increase the proportion of students leaving the college with five or more high grade GCSEs including English and mathematics so that it meets, at least, the government's minimum expectation for attainment by:
  - making sure that all groups of students, including those eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority make good or better progress.
- Improve students' behaviour by:
  - reducing low-level disruption in lessons so that learning time for all students is maximised
  - reinforcing the need for all students to show respect and courtesy towards each other and their teachers
  - continuing to implement strategies to reduce the number of exclusions and improve attendance, particularly of students supported by the pupil premium at Key Stage 4.
- Urgently improve the impact of leadership and management in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching by:
  - making sure that senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the college is doing takes account of all aspects of the college's work in order to provide an accurate picture of performance and inform the priorities in the improvement plan

- using performance management rigorously to improve the quality of teaching and hold staff robustly to account for the standards achieved by students
- sharing the good practice of high performing middle leaders with their colleagues in order to drive up the quality of leadership and management across the college
- carrying out an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved
- undertaking a review of the college's use of the pupil premium in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the college.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 November 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited a range of lessons in different subjects and observed morning registration in two classes. They also visited department meetings at which teachers discussed students' progress. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders, three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body and a parent governor, a representative from the local authority and the two associate headteachers who support the school. Inspectors reviewed documents including minutes of governing body meetings, attendance data, information relating to students' behaviour and reviews of the work of English, mathematics and science departments undertaken by the associate headteachers. Informal discussions were held with students of different ages.

### **Context**

The number of students on roll has reduced from 500 at the time of the last inspection to 457.

Two teachers have left the school since the first monitoring inspection and another teacher is absent on maternity leave. A further three teachers are leaving the school at the end of the autumn term and another teacher will be taking maternity leave from January 2015.

The headteacher has resigned and will leave the school on 31 December 2014. An associate headteacher, who was formerly headteacher of an outstanding school in Lancashire, will lead the school on an interim basis through the spring term 2015 while governors seek to make a permanent appointment. She will be supported by another associate headteacher with a very successful track record.

Two new governors have been appointed and a new committee structure has been adopted by the governing body.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The standards attained by students who sat GCSE examinations in 2014 were below the government's floor standards which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. There was a modest increase in the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades at A\* to C including English and mathematics in comparison with 2013, but standards were below those found nationally in a range of subjects including mathematics, English, art and design, French, Spanish, geography, history, biology, chemistry, physics, physical education and resistant materials. Attainment compared favourably with national levels in English literature, religious studies and drama. The proportion of students making expected progress

improved in English but not in mathematics. No groups achieved well but performance was particularly weak for disadvantaged students and boys.

The school's current data show that there will be some improvement in 2015. Inspection evidence indicates that students are doing better now in mathematics as a result of more consistent teaching. There has been discontinuity in the English department for some time and, while the head of English and second in department have done much to shore up gaps in students' learning, not all groups are making strong enough progress. Ensuring that all Key Stage 4 classes work hard and make progress in English remains a significant priority for the school, particularly as further staffing changes are due to happen in the spring term. The school has made appropriate plans to ensure that new staff in the department are properly supported.

Across subjects, students are making more progress when they are taught well and when their attitudes to learning are positively harnessed. Better achievement is being secured in mathematics as a result of teachers having a closer focus on students' individual strengths and areas for improvement and adapting their teaching accordingly. Good progress was evident in some lessons observed by inspectors, but is not the case in all classes.

Students show enthusiasm for reading some texts, such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* which had captured the imagination of a Year 8 class. Whole-school arrangements for promoting students' reading are not strong enough to help compensate for some students' lack of confidence in reading. The current annual 'reading challenge week' is enjoyed by some students and staff but leads to disruption of subject teaching and is not an effective means of developing resilience and embedding reading skills. There is some provision for private reading in morning registration sessions for students in Years 7 and 8 but in other year groups, opportunities for basic skills development or reflection are lost and learning time is wasted. Other aspects of the school's work to improve students' achievement in literacy are stronger; students used subject-specific vocabulary well when teachers encouraged this.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teachers are working hard to improve students' learning. They have taken the findings of the section 5 inspection to heart and are keen to secure better outcomes for students. Inspectors observed some teaching and learning that was of an impressive quality, including in science where students were engaged in a practical investigation creating group presentations to explain rates of chemical reactions. Each group provided a piece of the jigsaw and explained their conclusions to the rest of the class. The teacher's expert subject knowledge, insightful questioning and insistence on effective specialist vocabulary from all students ensured that rapid progress was made and not a minute was wasted.

In history, students were highly motivated, engaged and enthused when acting as detectives scrutinising and interpreting witness statements about the appearance of 'Jack the Ripper'. They developed analytical skills well during an enjoyable and challenging activity. In mathematics, students made good progress in understanding and explaining different ways of calculating the areas of three dimensional shapes; their achievement was strong because of the teacher's effective questioning and patient intervention if any student was unsure of how to proceed.

In geography, Year 7 students made effective use of contour maps to create three-dimensional land forms from modelling paste. The activity was planned in response to the teacher's baseline assessment of students' geographical understanding on entry to the school, which had revealed weaknesses in their map work skills. The activity was meaningful and enjoyable, resulting in rapid gains in knowledge and understanding.

These examples illustrate that there is increasing good practice at Fearn's across subjects and a willingness among teachers to be creative in their approaches; the challenge is for this high quality practice to become the consistent norm.

Policies for teaching and learning, marking and assessment are well intentioned but too open to individual interpretation. Teachers' planning is variable in quality and depth and 'non-negotiables' are not clearly defined or implemented. This makes it more difficult for good practice to be shared effectively. Where weaker teaching occurs it is characterised by several features: an over-reliance on students volunteering to answer questions; weaknesses in spoken grammar being unchallenged so that students do not become confident users of standard English; insufficient adaptation of tasks to meet the needs of students of different abilities; unchallenging activities; and learning that progresses at a leisurely and lacklustre pace.

Some teachers' approach to setting homework lacks rigour. Not all students routinely note homework in their planners and they have mixed opinions as to its usefulness. Classroom displays are underdeveloped. Many walls include key words that may be of help to students, but there is relatively little students' work on walls exhibited to celebrate achievement and provide prompts for others' learning.

The quality of effectiveness of teachers' marking is improving overall. Teachers identify strengths and targets in students' work and, in the best examples, provide guidance that students find useful in supporting their learning; the best marking in science is of a notably high standard. Some students' books are still poorly presented, although there is evidence of a greater insistence by teachers on the basics of good presentation, including underlining dates and titles.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students told inspectors that behaviour is generally improving although it is still variable. A recent survey of students' opinions by one of the associate headteachers shows that 'talking and messing about in lessons' remains a concern to some students. Inspection evidence confirms this: low-level disruption continues to be present in a minority of lessons particularly, but not exclusively, in lower sets. Inappropriate language use by students has reduced but has not been eradicated. A new behaviour management system has been introduced that aims to challenge poor behaviour swiftly and reward good behaviour. It has reduced the amount of learning time lost in the past when the school used a 'time out' system. Students understand the chain of consequences for poor behaviour and attitudes and they generally value the 'smileys' that are given for good behaviour and which they can accumulate to earn rewards. The use of sanctions and rewards is not yet consistent across the school; some 'smileys' are too freely given and this potentially demeans their value. Similarly, the escalation in 'consequences' leads too quickly to severe penalties for some students. Students recognise that the school has become 'stricter' and think, overall, that this is a good thing.

Most students listen to their teachers in class, although some admit that they 'play up' to temporary teachers. Their attention sometimes wanes when they are asked to work independently or in groups, particularly if they are unclear as to the task they are completing. Rather than asking their teacher for further guidance, some students start to talk about things that are unrelated to their work.

The school makes effective use of alternative curriculum provision, particularly for students who have become disaffected. Links with alternative providers have been strengthened so that there is greater continuity regarding the expectations of the standard of work students must complete and expectations of how they should behave. The school can demonstrate that it has a positive impact on the behaviour and attendance of some students whose attitudes have improved over time due to particular interventions and support from the 'Diamond centre'.

There has been a small improvement in attendance. Absence from school is followed up assiduously.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Governors and senior leaders are pursuing their action plan to improve the school with vigour. Work to improve the quality of teaching has included both individually bespoke coaching and whole-school professional development. Teachers are aware of their own strengths and areas for development. There is an increasingly open culture of sharing ideas and practice. The associate headteacher's invitation to staff to 'show me where there is good work' has been positively received. The triangulation between teaching observed in lessons, work seen in students' books



and progress made by students over time based on formal assessments has been strengthened to enable leaders to make more secure judgements about the quality of teaching.

The senior leaders responsible for teaching and learning have an in-depth knowledge of the work of teachers in the school. Similarly, the deputy headteacher responsible for improving behaviour now has a wealth of information to draw on that enables her to understand trends in behaviour across groups and subjects readily. The impact of leaders' work to improve teaching and behaviour management in tandem to raise achievement is still too variable.

Subject leaders have recently completed departmental self-evaluations. This is a new activity for them and their evaluations are mixed in terms of the detail of analysis and the objectivity of conclusions. The self-evaluation documents are not always well-evidenced. This area of development is recognised by the school; one of the associate headteachers is working to develop subject leaders' skills in this aspect of their role. Departmental action plans are generally well constructed but sometimes lack detail regarding evaluation criteria.

The associate headteacher who will be leading the school in the spring term 2015 has established positive relationships with staff and students. She is energetic and tenacious. She brings a wealth of experience and insight to the school and has lost no time in soliciting the views of students and staff as to what makes them proud to work at Fearn and what changes they would like to see made. The outcomes of these surveys are being used to steer the school.

The reviews of governance and of the school's use of pupil premium funding (additional government money) recommended at the last section 5 inspection have now been completed. Governors have developed an action plan to direct their work. Two new governors have been appointed.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school, understand the challenges it faces and are determined to secure better outcomes and life chances for the students it serves. They ask challenging questions which are increasingly focused on the impact of strategies to improve behaviour and address underachievement.

The school's work to engage parents requires further improvement. Parents report that they do not always receive information in a timely or accessible way. The associate headteacher has established a parents' forum, which will give parents the opportunity to provide feedback on the school's development. The school's recent Remembrance Day ceremony included parents in the creation of a poignant display of beautifully crafted ceramic poppies. This is a visual indication of how collaborative work with the community can be developed and make a positive difference.



## **External support**

The local authority has brokered the support of two associate headteachers to secure better leadership at the school. Their experience and objectivity has been invaluable in enabling school leaders to see how management systems can be improved and developed; they have also recognised the imperative for a refocusing on the school's core values and mission. The associate headteachers are building the capacity of senior and middle leaders to initiate, monitor and evaluate improvement. They have undertaken reviews in English, mathematics and science that have accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement. They are now using this information to share good practice across the school. The support of local authority consultants is appreciated by the school, including the completion of a behaviour audit to check objectively on the quality of behaviour for learning.

### **The school should take further action to:**

- Advance the school's plans to seek and reflect on the views of parents so that they can be more fully involved in the school's improvement journey.