

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment
Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 618 8524 **Direct T** 01695 566932

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 01695 729320

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct email: hcarnall@cfbt.com



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Mrs Heather Cooper
Headteacher
Bramhall High School
Seal Road
Bramhall
Stockport
Cheshire
SK7 2JT

Dear Mrs Cooper

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bramhall High School, Stockport

Following my visit to your school on 9 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- revisit improvement planning documentation to ensure that objectives and priorities are coherent
- broaden opportunities for teachers to learn from observing good and outstanding practice within their own school and beyond
- continue to develop the role of middle leaders so they are fully accountable for the monitoring, evaluation and improvements in teaching and learning in their departments
- further develop teachers' understanding of how to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities and those with special educational needs.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, students, the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement plans were evaluated.

Main findings

Since the section 5 inspection senior leaders and governors have acted with a sense of commitment and urgency to improve the school towards becoming 'good'. Leaders have strategies in place to bring together the School Development Plan and the Requires Improvement Action Plan into one comprehensive document that prioritises the identified areas for improvement. Actions in the current improvement plans are well underway and some early milestones have been met. The plans have clear timelines, personnel and resource implications but do not always ensure a clear separation between those responsible for carrying out the actions and those monitoring their effectiveness.

Senior leaders with responsibility for data and achievement and for teaching and learning have been working together to improve outcomes across the school. Middle leaders are increasingly aware of their responsibility to ensure good teaching and learning in their departments together with improved progress outcomes across the range of students. Improved systems for the management of data have helped teachers plan more effectively to meet students' needs and intervene where underachievement is identified.

The school has developed the opportunity for students to voice their opinions to ensure that on a regular basis all groups are consulted on developments in teaching and learning.

The marking of work and the feedback students receive has been a key focus for improvement and the students I met approve of the changes. All agreed that marking now helped them to improve their work and was more likely to lead to one to one conversations with their teacher about their progress. They commented that behaviour in lessons had improved since teachers had started to apply the 'Bramhall Way' behaviour policy with rigour and consistency. Students were particularly pleased with improvements to teaching and learning which they described as 'more interesting' with 'more groupwork and practical activities' and 'less copying out of books', and most could describe an engaging and memorable lesson they had experienced in recent weeks. However, despite these improvements the students were reluctant to grade the school highly and they were all vociferously unhappy about the poor state of the student toilets.

Following the last inspection governors have reviewed their practice and have developed guidance to ensure consistency in meetings, for example when liaising with middle leaders. Plans are in place to re-constitute the Governing Body in

September taking into account recommendations from the forthcoming external review of governance.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Since the last inspection a range of activities have been brokered by the local authority to support senior and middle leaders. This has included: a review of the use and impact of the pupil premium fund; a review of the provision for students with disabilities and those with special educational needs, with follow up support from an ex HMI; support for middle leaders from a local teaching school; support for subject teachers through the local subject networks; and a review of the work of the Governing Body from a national leader of governance.

The school has brokered the review of teacher assessments from a local outstanding school. Members of the senior team have also visited a school in Staffordshire that is working to move out of the 'requires improvement' category. Teachers have attended Ofsted's 'Better English' and 'Better mathematics' conferences and a 'Through the lens' event. It is too early to judge the full impact of these initiatives.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stockport.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector