

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@cftb.com

22 April 2015

Mr Rob Kitching
Headteacher
Ashington High School Sports College
Green Lane
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 8DH

Dear Mr Kitching

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ashington High School Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 21 April 2015, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and the local authority's Commissioner for Teaching and Learning. The local authority's statement for action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. I also conducted a tour of three classrooms with one of the senior leaders where we looked at books, teaching and talked to students about their work and changes in school.

Context

Since the last inspection an additional senior leader has been added to the leadership team. The strategic reviews of English and mathematics begun before the inspection have been completed. The Department for Education has indicated the school is likely to become an academy. Discussions have yet to take place.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher, senior teachers and governors have accepted the judgement of special measures. Immediately following the inspection they developed plans to tackle the areas that need to improve. New systems are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and check on the progress students are making in class. A root and branch review of the leadership structure is being finalised. Senior leaders report that they and their teams are beginning to be held to account more robustly for the impact of their work, through more specific appraisal targets that are closely linked to the quality of teaching and its impact on students' achievements.

The governing body has secured support from an outstanding school, John Spence Community High in North Tyneside to guide them in improving their skills and in driving improvements across the school. Senior staff have benefited from seeing outstanding practice in this school. Their skills in monitoring and quality-assuring the work in school are being developed through training, including the use of regular joint lesson observations conducted with the headteachers from across the Trust. They are beginning to conduct joint observations with external partners. More opportunities to work with experts from outside the Trust are planned, but these need to be extended further. Senior leaders report that such work is giving them a clearer, independent view of what outstanding teaching and learning look like and helping them to check on their own views of teaching more accurately.

The regular training programme for teachers is now linked to the recommendations within the inspection report and to meet the needs of students who are not achieving as well as they should. Plans are also in place for teachers to observe and learn from outstanding practice in other schools, in order to raise expectations quickly of what good teaching looks like. However, this has not happened quickly enough. Senior leaders have undertaken considerable work to improve the quality and impact of teachers' marking and feedback to students. All students who spoke to me reported that marking is improving and this is helping them to understand gaps in their learning, any misunderstandings, what they are doing well and what they need to do to reach the next level. They consider that the quality of teaching is also improving, although they say there is much variation across the school. Senior leaders know there is still more to do to embed the good practice to which students refer. Examples of highly effective marking were seen during the monitoring inspection as well as weaker practice. Leaders know that the quality remains variable and are continuing to take action to eliminate inconsistencies. Students' books show that poor presentation, spelling and grammatical errors are not always picked up by teachers well enough; including in subjects other than English. Not enough has been done to ensure that the assessment information teachers have about students' different abilities is used to inform the activities students complete in class. Checks on students' progress, so that those at risk of falling behind can be identified quickly and action taken to halt any slippage, are not as regular in Year 9 as in Year 11.

External reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium funding (additional government money) have recently been completed within recommended timescales. Key actions and targets being developed from these reviews have yet to be embedded in the school improvement plan. The recent review of pupil premium placed on the school's website indicates that gaps are narrowing between the achievement of students in Year 11 who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not.

Governors have developed stronger systems to monitor the school's work through the use of the outstanding school and other external consultants they have procured to help. They have access to a broader range of performance information about students' attendance and achievements; including succinct and clear commercial data sets that compare the school's Year 11 performance to that of other schools nationally.

The school improvement plan includes all areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection. It is very detailed, with a significant number of overarching achievement targets. However, these are mainly for Year 11 and Year 13 students and not for all students or groups of students across the school. Targets to reduce absence and persistent absence are not challenging enough and predict that absence rates will still be much higher than average by the end of the school year. There are few specific, numerical achievement or attendance targets for students entitled to the pupil premium or students with special educational needs; both groups have particular high absence and persistent absence rates. Timescales for actions identified are within a very short window, mainly from February 2015 to May 2015, and do not show the actions that will be undertaken beyond this. Timescales for many actions have no starting points or end points and many targets do not identify the current published outcomes in the school, or national averages so governors cannot check if targets are challenging enough. The plan does not identify the resources required. A colour-coded 'traffic light' system has been developed to check on progress and some actions are already coloured 'green'. However, this indicates that the action has been completed, rather than the impact of the action.

The local authority's statement for action identifies its response to the judgement of special measures appropriately, the actions taken so far and the plans for monitoring and evaluating the school's work. The local authority provided the names of the lead professionals to undertake the reviews of governance and the pupil premium in a timely manner. The local authority's recently appointed Commissioner for Teaching and Learning has just joined the school's already established strategic school advisory group, in order to work with governors in checking on and challenging the school's progress. Consequently, the impact of the challenge and support the local authority can bring to bear has yet to be realised.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement for action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Ashington Learning Partnership Trust is to change significantly from September; from a three-tier system into a two-tier primary and secondary model. This means students will start Ashington High in Year 7 and not Year 9. There are many staff vacancies to fill. In order to smooth transition and ensure that the best candidates for the positions can be secured in key subjects, the school may appoint up to three newly qualified teachers. This is specifically up to one each in physics, English and mathematics; as long as they can be coached and mentored by experienced link tutors who are outstanding teachers, skilled in managing behaviour and with a track record of supporting new entrants into the profession successfully. Plans for the newly qualified teachers should be submitted to me before they start their employment.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector