

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



18 June 2015

Mrs Helen Stead
Headteacher
Fearn Community Sports College
Fearn Moss
Stacksteads
Bacup
Lancashire
OL13 0TG

Dear Mrs Stead

Special measures monitoring inspection of Fearn Community Sports College

Following my visit to your college on 16 and 17 June 2015, with Alan Parkinson, Additional Inspector, 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 college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the college 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 college is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The college may 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 Director of Children's Services 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 expectations 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.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, two groups of students, a small group of parents, three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, the two associate headteachers providing support to the college and a consultant teacher from a good local school who is supporting the leadership of the English department. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including: minutes of governing body meetings, data about the achievement, attendance and behaviour of students, newsletters written to parents by the headteacher, records of monitoring undertaken by the local authority and by college leaders. Inspectors also looked at a range of students' exercise books, observed students' learning in lessons, and attended tutorial sessions and an assembly.

Context

The deputy headteacher at the time of the previous inspection has been appointed as substantive headteacher; she took up this post in April 2015. The associate headteacher who led the college during the spring term is providing mentoring support for the substantive headteacher for the duration of the summer term. The head of English, who was on maternity leave during the previous monitoring inspection, has resigned. The lead practitioner in English, who took up post in January 2015, is providing cover for the leadership of the English department, supported by the head of modern foreign languages and also by a teacher who is lead practitioner in English from a good local school. Two teachers, including the head of art, have recently left the college, along with three members of support staff. Three permanent teachers, including a member of the senior leadership team, have resigned their posts and will leave at the end of the summer term 2015. The contracts of five temporary members of staff will not be renewed. One parent governor has resigned.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The college's data indicate that the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics, is likely to rise in 2015. Students and teachers expended considerable energy in preparation for the GCSE examinations; revision sessions were well attended and students' coursework was completed on time. In subjects including English, the quality of students' work was moderated by professionals outside the college and teachers' assessments were agreed to be accurate.

Although attainment levels are rising, the proportions of students making expected progress in English and mathematics remain lower than those found nationally because the college has not been able to compensate fully for the legacy of underachievement which has been evident over time. The proportions of students exceeding expected progress are also likely to be lower than national figures.

The college is optimistic that the achievement of students currently in the college is improving due to better teaching, well-targeted support and the more consistent adherence by staff to college policies. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are rising in a range of subjects, although the most able students in the college are not always challenged to attain the highest possible standards.

The gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers are beginning to close, although the achievement of both disadvantaged and other students remains below national figures. Leaders and governors attribute the narrowing of gaps to effectively targeted support, some of which is funded through the pupil premium. There is more work to be done to analyse the precise impact of this funding, along with that which is provided to help students catch up when they join Year 7 with low attainment in English and mathematics.

Achievement in religious studies, art and design, and information technology continues to be strong.

The college's data indicate that students who are disabled or who have special educational needs generally make reasonable progress as a result of the support they receive; however, the college's evaluation of the amount of progress these students make in improving their reading ability is overgenerous. Students' reading skills are not tested frequently enough to give the college precise information as to how effective the support programmes are and whether they need to be adjusted to better meet the needs of individual students.

The college is reviewing its approach to target-setting for students in the new academic year to build in an increased level of aspiration.

The quality of teaching

Teachers have benefited from well-considered training, some of which has been provided by external consultants, and some of which has been the result of sharing practice within the college. Leaders' monitoring indicates that teachers' questioning has improved, so that students are now required to explain their thinking in more detail during lessons. Inspectors' observations confirmed the college's view; for example, in history, Year 8 students showed a good understanding of the potential flaws in transcripts of statements attributed to illiterate nineteenth-century mill-workers. Their understanding developed as a result of their teacher's careful questioning. Teachers are also providing more opportunities for students to develop their independent thinking. This was apparent in a Year 8 Spanish lesson in which the teacher withheld answers from students so that the onus was on them to develop their expressive language by researching synonyms and extending their repertoire of Spanish connectives. In mathematics, students selected work at the appropriate level of difficulty and challenged themselves to achieve highly, for example in determining solutions to quadratic equations at GCSE level or finding the area of shapes in Year 7. In mathematics, students study the same topics as others

in their year group, but master them at different depths. A good level of challenge is increasingly evident across subjects, but there are still occasions when learning proceeds too slowly because teachers underestimate what students can achieve.

The teaching of literacy in different subjects is still inconsistent. Teachers are more thorough now in identifying spelling errors in students' work and insisting that students correct them, but they are not all confident in modelling spoken Standard English or in knowing how to help students to read and write well. Leaders recognise the urgent need to provide additional training for staff to develop their ability to support students' literacy skills. There are regular opportunities for students to read during tutorial sessions, but these are not always used productively; some students select books that neither challenge nor interest them and do not develop reading comprehension or stamina to equip them to meet the more rigorous demands of the new National Curriculum.

The quality of teachers' marking has improved. Students now receive more advice from their teachers on how to improve their work and there are many examples of teachers posing specific questions for individual students to answer to extend their thinking. Most students respond sensibly to these prompts. The work of Year 10 history students seen by inspectors showed their increasing skills level as they moved from identifying key information about early surgery to evaluating the impact of James Lister's work.

Many teachers have worked hard to improve the environment within their classrooms so that more students' work is displayed and celebrated. This is a prominent feature in English, humanities, science and modern foreign languages. Students' artwork greatly enhances the college's social spaces. Examples of excellent work are highly visible to visitors entering the college. Students glowed with pride when they talked about their high quality work with inspectors. During lessons, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to share good examples of students' work to model expectations of what students can achieve.

Teachers have access to data about students' attainment levels and factors that may influence their performance. Some use this effectively, for instance to determine seating arrangements, but they do not all routinely set different work or adapt their expectations depending on the attainment profiles of individuals.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students who spoke with inspectors expressed the view that behaviour around college has improved. They agreed that there are fewer occasions of disruption to learning, although the behaviour of a few individuals still concerns them and their teachers. The rates of exclusion from the college, both permanent and fixed-term, have increased; this is attributable to some serious behaviour incidents involving Key Stage 4 students, often relating to complex issues outside college. Exclusion levels in Key Stage 3 have reduced. The college has recently admitted several students who have had difficulties in other schools, sometimes because of their behaviour. Most of

these students have settled well at Fearn's because staff have worked hard to identify and meet their needs, while trying to maintain the impetus for learning among other students.

The attendance of students in Key Stage 3 has improved, whereas comparatively high absence and persistent absenteeism in Key Stage 4 mean that the college's overall attendance figures are below their target and below national attendance levels. The college continues to work openly with parents and external agencies and uses different strategies to promote good attendance. Students value the college's rewards system which enables them to accumulate 'smiley' credits towards valued prizes including places on college trips.

Students' attitudes to learning have become more positive; this is demonstrated by the pride with which most, but not all, now present their work. The vast majority of students pay attention in lessons, do what staff ask of them and take account of the feedback teachers provide regarding their work. Students are particularly positive about teaching that 'inspires' them, such as in religious education, which many claimed to be their 'best subject.'

On a few occasions, however, students make poor behaviour choices, more commonly when they are being taught by temporary teachers. A few do not conduct themselves well when their misbehaviour results in them being sent out of lessons. Opportunities for some students to succeed in physical education were limited during the inspection because of their condoned non-participation. Those who did participate showed a keen, competitive spirit and an awareness of how to keep themselves healthy.

Some students expressed sadness that the college's reputation has been damaged by the poor behaviour of previous students and they want to improve the perception of the college. An increasing number of students willingly give their time to make a difference to their community; sports leaders are looking forward to running a regional event, 'maths minions' are good ambassadors for their subject and newly-elected prefects are keen to take up their responsibilities. During this inspection, a group of Year 9 students presented a thought-provoking assembly about inspirational role models whose lives they had researched. Their peers listened attentively and respectfully to their account of how people such as Nick Vujicic, Bill Gates and Mother Teresa affected their thoughts about caring for one another.

The college's processes for acting on child protection concerns are rigorous, understood and followed by staff. Those students who receive additional pastoral support from the 'diamond centre' are helped to manage problems that might impact on their well-being or learning.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of the substantive headteacher has been welcomed by staff and students. Building on the foundations laid by the associate headteacher, she has maintained pace and energy and brought a sense of stability to the college. She knows the staff and students well and has a clear picture of what needs to be done to effect improvement. The college's staffing structure is being redesigned to improve leadership capacity and streamline performance management arrangements.

The leadership of teaching and learning has focused on topics such as improving the use teachers make of data and developing more powerful questioning. Workshops have been led by staff for staff, a strategy that has boosted morale by recognising the talent that exists in the college. All teachers have development support plans which are linked to the national Teachers' Standards. These plans are reviewed regularly and are regarded positively by teachers, who are keen to develop their practice; they appreciate the culture of clear accountability and effective communication within the college. There is a shared understanding that leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching must take into account students' progress over time; the mismatch between these two judgements led to an overgenerous view of teaching in the past.

Leaders and governors have, through careful planning and some tough decision-making, recovered a substantial budget deficit and ensured that the college is now on a sound financial footing. Governors are well-informed about the work of the school; they ask probing questions and willingly seek advice. They have sought and listened to the views of students, including in determining the new college uniform.

Leaders are working hard to build and sustain good relationships with primary schools. Those students who are joining Fearn's in September 2015 will bring examples of their best work with them from primary school to aid continuity and progression so that their college experience is positive from the outset. The mathematics department has an increasingly positive profile in the community because of the support that teachers are providing to Year 5 and Year 6 students in preparation for the rigours of Key Stage 3.

External support

The college receives the continuing effective support of the two experienced and insightful associate headteachers who have helped steer its improvement over the past year. One of these associates works alongside the headteacher and also supports the parents' forum, while the other supports subject leaders in developing their monitoring and evaluation skills. Jointly, their work has helped to embed sustainable management processes in college.

The leadership of English is being supported through the work of an English lead practitioner from a good local school. Her strength in curriculum-planning and her

support for moderating standards of students' work have helped to secure the foundations for the next academic year.

The local authority has an accurate view of the college's progress and the capacity of its leaders to secure further improvement. The local authority adviser reports to the governors' standards and effectiveness committee. As well as brokering the support of the associate headteachers and consultants for English and mathematics, she has made links with a Lancashire school in which there is effective management practice so that the leaders have a further opportunity to share approaches to developing consistency. The college is increasingly outward-facing; leaders' willingness to learn from effective practice elsewhere, including in schools they have identified for themselves, is a strength.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the skills of teachers to support students' literacy skills.