

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



11 December 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 with Sally Kenyon, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 December 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 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 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, leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection only in those subjects where the school has proven capacity to provide these teachers with high-quality professional support and leadership.

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
 - developing 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 group 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 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 pupils 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 improve the priorities in the improvement plan.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2015

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, teachers, groups of pupils, two consultant headteachers who support the school and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons, visited other lessons briefly to observe pupils' behaviour, watched tutorial sessions and an assembly. An inspector visited the school's inclusion centre, where pupils are sent when their behaviour is deemed unacceptable.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection that took place in July 2015, five permanent teachers have left their posts and the contracts of three temporary teachers have not been renewed. Three members of support staff have left the school. Permanent appointments have been made to the posts of head of English and head of personal, social and health education (PSHE) from within existing staff. Two pupil development leaders have been appointed. Three teachers have been promoted to the posts of associate assistant headteachers. They have some responsibility for whole-school developments as well as having oversight of the three faculties which have been recently created. A new head of art and technology has been appointed who will take up post on 7 December 2015. One teacher is absent from the mathematics department, another is on maternity leave and a further one will leave her post at the end of term. The number of pupils on roll has reduced to 386.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's performance in GCSE examinations in 2015 was significantly lower than leaders had predicted and did not meet the government's floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11. Only 27% of pupils left school having attained five or more GCSE grades including English and mathematics at grades A* to C. Results in mathematics were particularly weak and too many pupils made poor progress from their relative starting points. Attainment rose in English; however, the proportion of pupils making expected progress from their starting points was still much lower than that found nationally. Higher-attaining pupils made more progress and achieved better results than those in previous years in English; however, the school's overall progress measure at this level remained below the national figure. Attainment was similar to that found nationally in music, drama, religious studies, citizenship and biology but was low in subjects including art and design, information and communication technology, geography and technology subjects. The gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils in the school and all pupils nationally widened. The progress made across subjects by pupils from their starting points was weak.

School leaders have reviewed their information about the achievement of pupils currently in the school. They have regraded the test papers that pupils have taken in school in mathematics to ensure that teachers' assessments are not too generous. Leaders' own analysis of this information indicates that there will be improvement in 2016 and 2017. There are, however, too many variables, particularly with regard to the stability of teaching in mathematics, to give confidence that the performance levels that leaders predict will actually be reached.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is variable within and across subjects. Pupils told inspectors that 'how well you learn depends on which teacher you have'. They were particularly concerned that frequent changes of teacher, recently in mathematics and technology subjects, stopped them from making good progress. There is some good teaching in the school, characterised by thoughtful planning and effective engagement of pupils.

Where lessons start purposefully, pupils are more immediately focused and engaged, such as in a successful English lesson in which pupils drew on their previous learning quickly and effectively to list the features of persuasive text prior to analysing a political speech. Where lessons do not start briskly, momentum is lost and a battle of wills sometimes develops between a minority of pupils who do not want to learn and staff who are trying to teach them; this is not conducive to good learning.

Some teachers develop pupils' communication skills effectively, for instance in science where close attention is paid to consolidating pupils' understanding and accurate use of technical vocabulary. This is not done well in subjects across the school and pupils' books indicate that good written expression is not consistently promoted or expected. Too many pupils' books contain unfinished and poorly presented work.

Some teachers have improved the environment in their classrooms, for instance through the display of examples of pupils' work as well as displays of vocabulary and references to help them learn. Pupils appreciate efforts that are taken by their teachers to value their work in this way.

Most teachers apply the school's marking policy. Pupils generally receive feedback to help them improve their work. In science, geography and religious studies teachers insist that pupils complete corrections and they check that the comments they have made are acted upon. Where teachers demand high standards, pupils are more likely to comply. Some pupils make unnecessary repeated errors and present their work poorly because teachers do not apply the school's marking policy fully.

Teaching in tutorial sessions is not always well matched to pupils' needs. Some pupils do not see the point of the work they are given and consequently misbehave. This was seen when pupils were given general knowledge questions to answer with

no form of reference material. They quickly become disillusioned and disruptive because they did not know the answers and had no way of finding them out. There is some good practice in the use of tutorial time, for example in breaking down stereotypes which affect pupils' understanding of different religions.

Pupils are sometimes given opportunities to read, for instance in English and geography where reading aloud is encouraged. Pupils do not have good reading habits outside lessons. Some pupils are not able to read the materials that are presented to them during lessons. A new reading initiative has been introduced for pupils in Key Stage 3 but it is too soon for its impact to be evidenced. Pupils in Key Stage 3 have literacy targets in their planners but they do not use them effectively to see whether their work is improving.

Teachers sometimes make it too easy for pupils to avoid work. Pupils who do not participate in physical education lessons are not always provided with meaningful work. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that, even though there is a homework timetable in place, they actually receive very little homework, particularly in mathematics.

Temporary teachers are not always well supported by the school. This means that they do not always have the correct work available for the pupils that they teach: this exacerbates poor behaviour and faltering progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The quality of behaviour observed by inspectors during this monitoring inspection was very variable. Overall, behaviour has deteriorated since the last monitoring inspection. This view was corroborated by pupils who spoke with inspectors. In some classes, excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to learning underpinned pupils' good progress. On other occasions, wilful non-compliance with teachers' instructions led to disrupted learning. These observations mirror the findings of the school governors from their observation and recent interviews with pupils. A minority of pupils adversely affect the learning of others on a regular basis. While some pupils willingly support the school, for example by contributing to the writing of a new values statement, others show little allegiance to Fearn's and limited aspirations for their own success. Pupils report that staff do not use the 'consequences' system consistently.

The attendance of pupils in autumn term 2015 is lower than it was for the previous academic year. However, this is a school of two halves: 43% of pupils currently have had full attendance since the start of term, whereas too many other pupils are persistently absent from school. Some persistent absence is due to fixed-term exclusions that remain high and particularly affect pupils in Years 9 and 11. Persistent absence levels have risen in autumn term 2015 in comparison with the

last academic year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to be lower than that of their peers and the gap is not closing.

Most pupils wear their new uniform proudly. Pupils were involved in choosing the uniform and they prefer it to the previous one. A minority of pupils are resistant to wearing the correct footwear and not all parents are supportive of leaders' insistence on a smart, business like dress code. Similarly, the school has an ongoing battle to enforce the importance of punctuality. Too many pupils arrive late to morning registration and this results in a disorganised start to the school day. An opportunity to engage in an interesting discussion about world affairs was missed for some pupils because they arrived very late for registration.

Significant numbers of pupils are excluded to the school's inclusion unit during the school day. Some pupils freely admit that they 'wind teachers up' so that they can be sent to the centre. They regard this as an easy option. Often they have little meaningful work to do when they are in the inclusion centre, because their own class teachers do not always provide them with work to do there. The learning mentor tries hard to work with pupils and improve their behaviour; however, too many pupils are sent to the centre as a matter of routine and so the impact of this sanction is being lost.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

While senior leaders and governors have taken many difficult decisions, sometimes in response to situations that could not have been foreseen, the school's improvement journey has stalled and insufficient progress has been made towards the removal of special measures. There is too much inconsistency in the application of the school's policies by teachers: this relates principally to the effectiveness of planning to meet pupils' needs, marking and behaviour management.

Since taking up post in the summer term, the headteacher has been faced with a number of significant challenges. Along with other senior leaders, she understands the school's strengths and weaknesses and is committed to making a difference to the life chances of pupils. The number of pupils on roll has reduced dramatically, leading to staffing cuts which have been managed sensitively by the headteacher and governors. Although some staffing reduction was planned, there has also been unpredicted staff absence. The school has tried hard to deal with continued turbulence in staffing, particularly in the mathematics department, where there is significant discontinuity for pupils. As the number of pupils and staff has reduced, the school site has become more difficult to manage. Governors and leaders are considering change that can be made to improve the school environment and reduce the possibility of poor behaviour in areas which are difficult to supervise effectively.

The headteacher, deputy and assistant headteacher are working as hard as they can on many fronts. New appointments have been made to the senior leadership team

to build capacity to improve the school but these are very recent and so their impact is untested.

The deputy headteacher who leads on behaviour and personal development has good relationships with staff, pupils and external agencies. A significant number of pupils have behavioural difficulties which result in them being excluded from lessons. Leaders spend a disproportionate amount of time responding to issues that have escalated unnecessarily.

The head of English since her appointment, with the support of external consultants, has improved the curriculum and taken steps to ensure that pupils are better prepared for their examinations. She is proud of the improvements seen in English but recognises that there is further work to be done to accelerate their progress. There is now a full complement of teachers in the English department and this stability is helping to secure better outcomes.

The school's leaders have maintained a broad and balanced curriculum for most pupils despite staffing reductions. The curriculum does not, however, meet the needs of some of the pupils with more challenging behaviour. As a result, they are educated off-site or attend school on a part-time basis; neither solution is sustainable in the longer term.

Subject leaders have analysed the 2015 outcomes for their subjects and defined actions that they will take in response to pupils' performance. These include links with subject departments in other schools so that the standards pupils are achieving can be checked. The impact of middle leaders in setting high expectations within their departments is mixed. There is some particularly effective practice in science with regard to planning interesting activities and providing insightful feedback on which pupils act. There is mixed practice in other departments. Promising developments within the mathematics department that were reported following the previous monitoring inspection have been derailed because of discontinuity in staffing.

The school's governors are knowledgeable, committed and acutely aware of the difficulties the school faces. Despite their best efforts, the impact of their actions since the last monitoring inspection has been limited and they have been unable to stem the school's decline. Governors take steps to find out first-hand about the quality of teaching and behaviour. They consider solutions in an open-minded way and are working with the local authority and other schools to improve the situation. With the support of the business manager, they have managed to eradicate the school's budget deficit and are considering how best to improve the site so that it can be made more conducive to good behaviour and learning. Governors are in the process of reviewing the school's policies. They ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed.

External support

The school continues to be dependent upon external support to develop its capacity. Two consultant headteachers continue to monitor the school's work and provide helpful feedback to senior leaders. They are also helping to develop the skills of middle leaders, including those who are new to leadership roles. Changes in staffing have slowed this aspect of the school's development. Additional support from English and mathematics consultants has been brokered by the local authority. An English leader from a good local school gives support to the English department including for curriculum development. The behaviour and attendance consultant is also working with the school to develop teachers' skills. Additional support will be provided for the mathematics department from a teaching school in Lancashire.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that middle leaders take more responsibility for managing the quality of teaching and behaviour in their departments
- ensure that all teachers adhere to the school's policies for teaching, marking and behaviour management
- review the usage and impact of the school's inclusion facility.