

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

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 934
Direct F 01695 729 320
gtunnicliffe@cfbt.com



5 June 2009

Mr Phil Benaiges
Headteacher
The Wensleydale School
Richmond Road
Leyburn
North Yorkshire
DL8 5HY

Dear Mr Benaiges

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Wensleydale School

Following my visit with Stephen Wall and Bernard Jones, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 3 and 4 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures: - good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection - good

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler

Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of the Wensleydale School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 3-4 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, representatives from the local authority (LA), members of staff and groups of students.

Context

A deputy headteacher has been appointed and will take up her position at the beginning of the autumn term 2009.

Achievement and standards

The school has concentrated its efforts on raising standards and achievement in Years 10 and 11 to help these students overcome the previous legacy of underachievement. However, it is increasingly turning its attention to Years 7, 8 and 9 to make sure that firm foundations are laid for future learning. The school has made significant strides in introducing effective measures to check on students' progress as they move through the school. As a result, the school is now in a position to use data to set challenging targets and track accurately students' progress towards them. Students know how well they are expected to do and, importantly, most know what they need to do to reach their targets. As a result of robust, comprehensive and effective tracking systems, the school has been able to forecast a very significant rise in GCSE results in this year's examinations. If the predictions are proved to be correct and inspection evidence indicates that this is quite possible, then the school will have achieved its best ever results. Having correctly identified the main reason for boys' previous underachievement as a widespread failure to complete GCSE coursework, the school has ensured that coursework is completed on time and to a higher standard. This, together with extra revision and booster classes, is resulting in a significant narrowing of the gap between the achievement of boys and girls to a point close to parity.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Establish robust, consistent systems to track the progress of all students and implement measures to tackle underperformance quickly to close the gaps between boys' and girls performance – good

Personal development and well-being

The senior management has worked hard and to good effect in raising expectations, both among students and teachers as to what constitutes acceptable behaviour.

There is recognition that good behaviour is more than the absence of inappropriate behaviour. Senior staff have moved on from policing poor behaviour to actively encouraging good behaviour and positive relationships. Inspectors found little evidence of inadequate behaviour in comparison with that noted at the time of the previous inspection. Fixed-term exclusions have declined over the year. Rewards and sanctions are generally well understood and sanctions are usually applied consistently. However, there is little use of the rewards system to encourage positive behaviour. There is still work to do with a small minority of lower attaining boys who populate the isolation room and are responsible for the large majority of fixed-term exclusions.

Improved behaviour and attitudes to learning are starting to be seen in students enjoying their work and relishing their achievement. The more positive behaviour has extended to the corridors and playgrounds. Students are considerate of each other and polite to adults. They report far less harassment and bullying and say that they like to come to school. Well-formulated plans have been drawn up to ensure that students starting in Year 7 in September 2009 are well acquainted with the schools' expectations.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Implement consistent approaches to improve student's behaviour, ensuring students know the standards of behaviour expected of them – good.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school has improved significantly as teachers continue to embed and consolidate the improvements since the last inspection report. Targeted professional development and monitoring by senior leaders is improving teachers' effectiveness. In turn, this is starting to have a positive impact on tackling past underachievement, as the expectations of teachers and students rise.

The majority of teaching observed during the monitoring visit was good. Teachers plan more formally to meet the differing needs of students. In the best lessons, learning objectives are differentiated and teachers are clear about what they expect different ability groups to attain. This ensures that all students are challenged and can find success in their learning. Most lessons are structured well to ensure that learning is sequenced logically and students make clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and teach with confidence. In the most effective lessons, a combination of well-targeted planning and interesting and stimulating presentation, captures the interest of students and engages them. In these lessons, the students know where they are going in their learning, enjoy some involvement in active learning such as discussion or partner

work and can assess how successful they have been. Interactive whiteboards are not used in a consistent manner to extend learning opportunities for students.

In the most successful lessons, plenary sessions are effective in focusing closely on questions that gauge the progress students have made in relation to the learning intentions. However, this is not always the case and this inhibits the accuracy of teacher assessment. Opportunities are still missed to develop speaking and listening skills, for example, by using students' answers to springboard further ideas or by insisting on better use of the technical language of the subject.

Marking is satisfactory overall. At its best, students are informed about how their work stands in relation to objective standards such as National Curriculum levels or examination grades and how they can improve. However, there are some inconsistencies across faculties.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve teaching and learning by tailoring work to match student's needs and establishing consistent approaches to ensuring all students know how well they are performing and what to do to improve – good.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership is an effective unit and has successfully introduced initiatives that are securing improvement. This is particularly evident in the quality of teaching and learning, progress and students' attitudes to learning, including behaviour which has improved over the past twelve months. Senior leadership is aware of the need to ensure that the improvements secured since entering special measures are sustained, particularly during non-inspection activity. The leadership and management of English, mathematics and science are secure and impacting positively on students' performance.

Faculty leaders are being increasingly held to account by the headteacher. An agreed format for self-evaluation has been established with emphasis placed on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The move towards holding faculty leaders to account is timely, particularly in the non-core subjects. It is particularly appropriate in respect of humanities, where insufficient attention is given to the conscious, consistent implementation of agreed whole-school policies in relation to teaching and learning. For example, the quality of marking in History and Geography is not as good as it is in other subjects. The same can be said of the quality of presentation which is often unacceptable and does little to inculcate good working habits.

The governing body continues to challenge senior leaders and provides good support. The role played by link governors is developing well giving them a good insight into the quality of provision.

The impact of specialist status continues to develop well. The projected pass rates at GCSE in 2009, based on an analysis of data and test results, indicate significantly improved performance. The take up for A level has risen and the development of a vocational curriculum through BTEC qualifications is meeting the needs of a wider student group. Good links are being established with the local primary schools to aid integration and enhance curriculum continuity.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Ensure middle leaders adopt consistent approaches to quality assure teaching and learning – good

External support

The local authority provides good support and there is a productive working relationship between the school and local authority officers.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure the consistent implementation of agreed whole-school policies in relation to teaching and learning.