

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 566932
Direct F 01695 729320
hcarnall@cfbt.com



20 May 2009

Mrs Kate Sanderson
Headteacher
Sowerby Bridge High School
Albert Road
Sowerby Bridge
West Yorkshire
HX6 2NW

Dear Mrs Sanderson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 May 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors and the students I spoke to in meetings and in lessons.

The information you provided indicates a change in the context of your school since the previous inspection. The rate of mobility in the school population has risen and there is a significant increase in the number of in-year admissions, including recent arrivals from Slovakia and the Czech Republic who need support learning English. In addition, others have behaviour issues from previous schools and this has contributed to a sharp rise in the rate of exclusions. A factor in the rise in new admissions is the closure of a neighbouring school. The school has strategies in place to improve the induction and provision for new arrivals and students at risk of exclusion.

As a result of the inspection on 2 and 3 April 2008, the school was asked to:

- increase the amount of good and better teaching in order to raise standards and improve achievement more quickly, especially in English
- be more consistent in the setting of challenging targets and the quality of advice given to students
- raise standards and improve achievement in the sixth form.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.



Achievement at GCSE has improved. In 2008, the contextual value added score and the average points score increased significantly because students took a larger number of accredited courses. The proportion who gained five good GCSEs including English and mathematics also improved. In 2008, GCSE students made the expected progress from Year 7 which was an improvement on previous performance. School data suggest there will be a further improvement in 2009 which may overcome the past underachievement at Key Stage 4. In particular, English GCSE students appear on track to make satisfactory progress, in contrast to previous underachievement. At Key Stage 3 in 2008, students made at least expected progress in English, mathematics and science. This is likely to be maintained in 2009.

The quality of teaching and learning, including in the sixth form and in English, has improved. Leaders and managers have almost eradicated weak teaching and have increased the proportion of good teaching across the school. Individual teachers have been supported effectively to improve their teaching. A higher level of consistency and quality of lessons has been achieved as a result of in-service training and through rigorous monitoring and evaluation. This has been well supported by the formation of a teaching and learning group and the introduction of a teaching and learning policy. Evidence of regular lesson observations carried out by the school and external consultants demonstrates a higher proportion of good teaching which is now in line with schools nationally. Observations during the inspection confirmed this picture. The school has developed a good level of consistency in the use of lesson objectives and outcomes and students confirm that clarity about the purpose of lessons and what is expected of them is helping to improve their learning.

Leaders have applied a new policy for setting targets consistently across the school. The system takes greater account of individual rates of progress, and sets higher expectations of students. These more aspirational targets are also intended to reduce the underachievement of some more able students. The monitoring of targets and discussion of progress are more frequent and systematic at all levels. Subject leaders, teachers, form tutors and students are all clear about individual targets and the progress being made towards them.

Significant changes to provision in the sixth form have been made although the impact on achievement has not yet been demonstrated. In 2008 A-level results were still very low and achievement at A-level was inadequate. However, AS-level results showed some improvement and students' rate of progress increased and was average by national standards. School assessment data indicate that students are likely to achieve improved point scores at A and AS level in 2009. The curriculum changes in place to increase the number of courses taken by each student indicate further improvement for 2010.

The leader of the sixth form has worked effectively with senior managers to improve the quality of provision. The sixth form has been integrated into the planning and quality assurance policies of the whole school. Staff changes were made which improved the quality of teaching in some subjects. The monitoring of teaching and

learning and students' progress in the sixth form is more proactive and purposeful and expectations of staff and students have been raised. Actions are taken promptly to support or challenge students identified as underachieving and a new reward system motivates students to meet their targets. The well organised extended study programme has increased the amount and quality of study carried out by students at home, supported by the provision of laptops. Students appreciate the additional pressure and direction and recognise its value in getting them to work harder and achieve more.

The school is on track to improve recruitment to the sixth form in 2009 as a result of more effective guidance through taster sessions and individual interviews for Year 11 students. Entry criteria have been provided to ensure that weak students are not inappropriately recruited onto courses. Students value the progression module provided through local universities which increases their understanding and motivation to go to university. The level of applications made to higher education increased in 2008 but fell in 2009. This needs further investigation.

The sixth form curriculum has been redesigned effectively to give improved and more coherent provision for Level 1, 2 and 3 courses from September 2009, and plans are being developed to extend the range of choice in future through collaborative provision with neighbouring schools.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernard Campbell".

Her Majesty's Inspector