

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 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

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Dame Dela Smith
Headteacher
Darlington Education Village
Salters Lane South
Darlington
County Durham
DL1 2AN

Dear Dame Dela

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Moira Fitzpatrick and I inspected your school on 8 December 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. I would also like to offer my thanks to the students who spoke to us during the inspection.

Haughton Community School became a part of a hard federation incorporating a primary school and an all-age special school in 2005. The three schools retain their separate status but have a shared budget, a federated governing body and shared leadership and management arrangements. The school occupies a new building opened in April 2006 as part of an 'Education Village'. Since the last inspection, three senior leaders have been appointed to the Haughton team.

As a result of the inspection on 3–4 December 2008, the school was asked to raise standards in core subjects of English, mathematics and science at both key stages to ensure all students achieve well, make sure that the tasks and activities in lessons meet the needs of all students and to take more effective action to eliminate underachievement by sharpening up the use of data and other monitoring information. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

good progress in making improvements

and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 rose significantly in 2009 when compared to the previous year. Provisional examination results indicate that the proportion of students gaining five GCSEs grades A to C including English and mathematics rose by 23% when compared to results in 2008. The proportion of students achieving five GCSEs grades A to C shows a trend of continuous improvement, having doubled over the last three years to reach 77%. The school's own records indicate that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make good progress from their starting points.

The school has made good progress in raising attainment in English, mathematics and science at both Key Stages when compared to previous years. In 2009, students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 shows improvement in all three core subjects. At GCSE grades A to C, students performed best in science with provisional results indicating a rise of around 14% to 61% when compared to 2008. Mathematics shows the most dramatic improvement rising by 28% to around 51%, whilst attainment in English rose by six per cent to 47%. The school's own data for the autumn term shows that at Key Stage 3, the standards students are currently attaining in mathematics and science are already ahead of those achieved at the end of the last academic year. Within this positive picture of standards rising overall, some pockets of underachievement are evident. For example, boys performed less well at the end of Key Stage 4 than girls, and standards in English at Key Stage 3 are proving more difficult to shift than in mathematics and science. School leaders have carefully analysed the reasons behind these pockets of underperformance and are implementing appropriate strategies to tackle them. As a result, attainment in the core subjects looks set to rise further by the end of the current academic year.

Teachers work very hard to develop good relationships with students and to tailor tasks and activities to match their needs; although the impact of these efforts on the pace of learning varies. Where tasks and activities are most clearly having a positive impact, teachers' expectations are high and the students' belief in themselves as independent learners is improving. Students comment that they are 'worked with as individuals' and they especially enjoy practical activities. Where good intentions are less successful, activities are adapted to stimulate interest, but they are not always pitched at the right level or students rely too heavily on the teacher. In some lessons, teachers are not alert enough to what activities sustain interest or when they do recognise this, fail to manage the switch between activities assertively enough. When this happens, students disengage, creating opportunities for low-level disruption to interrupt learning. Changes to the curriculum such as the introduction of the 'Opening Minds' programme in Key Stage 3 are successfully accelerating students' progress and raising standards markedly. Here activities clearly meet students' needs and sustain interest. This results in good progress in lessons and some beautifully written and presented work.

The recruitment of three very able senior leaders has strengthened the leadership team substantially resulting in more effective performance management of all aspects of the school's work. Data and information from the school's own monitoring is being used to good effect to eliminate underachievement and target actions more precisely; as testified by the significant improvements in progress and attainment in mathematics this year. The 'effective learning team' and coaching developments are enthusing and motivating staff and sharing best practice across departments more effectively. All of which bodes well for further sustained improvement.

The school's specialist status for performing arts is having a positive impact on its work. Activities, such as the Brazilian Carnival, create a hive of activity throughout the school and engages with the local community through a town centre parade. Specialist targets are being met or exceeded.

The school looks outside its boundary to secure support that will promote improvement, but has found it hard to find suitable support for English and this partly explains why it has proved more difficult to raise standards in this core subject. However, the school has recently managed to secure relevant external expertise. School leaders are confident that this, in conjunction with more effective sharing of best practice internally and increased leadership capacity, will accelerate the rate of improvement in English so that it matches that seen to date in mathematics and science. The school has benefited well from the good support provided by the National Challenge Advisor.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley
Her Majesty's Inspector