

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

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 01695 566930  
Direct F 01695 729320

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Mrs Angela Armytage  
Headteacher  
Yewlands School Technology College  
Creswick Lane  
Grenoside  
Sheffield  
South Yorkshire  
S35 8NN

Dear Mrs Armytage

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 October 2009, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to your students, senior colleagues and the chair of governors for their time and courtesy.

Since the last inspection the school building project has been successfully completed and the school has moved to a single site. The senior leadership team has been restructured and three new appointments made to it. The school has established a partnership with a school from a neighbouring authority to develop new strategies for raising standards and improving provision. This development is part of the school's work with the National Challenge adviser.

As a result of the inspection on 16 -17 April 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve standards and achievement across the curriculum, particularly in relation to students' skills in literacy and numeracy
- improve the quality and consistency of teaching
- improve students' understanding of how they can improve their work and reach their targets.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

satisfactory progress in making improvements and

satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The standards of attainment are low, but improving. In 2009 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics rose significantly to reach the target agreed with the National Challenge adviser, but remains below the national target level. Overall achievement improved over the period from 2006 to 2008 and was satisfactory and there is evidence that this trend of improvement was maintained in 2009. Achievement has not yet improved sufficiently in the core subjects of English and mathematics to remedy earlier underachievement. However, in lessons students are making at least satisfactory progress and many are making good progress.

Although, teaching remains satisfactory overall there is now a significant proportion of good teaching. A structured programme of lesson monitoring and evaluation identifies strengths and areas for development for departments and individuals. The school is making effective use of experienced staff, an advanced skills teacher and consultants to develop teaching through coaching and mentoring. In the best lessons students engage well with carefully planned activities. They show interest and enjoyment in learning and demonstrate the skills of working both independently and collaboratively. This best practice should be used to reduce the amount of satisfactory teaching. In the less effective lessons activities are not always sufficiently well matched to the needs of the students and the teacher dominates the lesson. This produces students who are passive learners and the rate of progress slows. In some lessons there is insufficient focus on the needs of the most able students.

The systems for setting targets for students and tracking their progress have been refined. Most students are aware of their targets and report that teachers readily provide advice on how to improve their work. There is an ongoing focus on developing assessment strategies that support learning, including peer assessment. There are very good examples of staff now providing regular and detailed feedback to students on specific pieces of work. However, the routine marking of work is not consistently providing detailed guidance to students on how to improve. The systems of assessment vary between subject areas. The school should now use the best practice within the school to establish a whole school approach to assessment and guidance.

Specialist college status has been used effectively to enhance provision through staffing and curriculum review. Good practice within specialist subjects has been successfully disseminated to other areas within the school and to support partner primary schools in enhancing provision, for example in science. The school met all but one of its specialist college targets in 2009.

Support to the school has been co-ordinated by the National Challenge adviser. There has been effective use of consultants, the local authority School Improvement Advisor and a partner school to develop provision and bring about improvement. The school has demonstrated that it has enhanced its capacity for improvement through improving trends in achievement, attendance and behaviour. You and your senior team have a clear awareness of strengths and areas for development and provide focused leadership for improvement. Improvement planning is well established and progress is monitored regularly.

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

Garry Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector