

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancashire Investment Centre
Maple View
White Moss Business Park
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566934
Direct F 01695 729320
e-mail gtunncliffe@cfbt.com



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Mr J White
Woodkirk High Specialist Science School
Rein Road
Tingley
Wakefield
West Yorkshire
WF3 1JQ

Dear Mr White

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 25 February 2010. I appreciated the time you gave prior to the visit and your hospitality and cooperation during the inspection. Please pass on thanks to everyone involved in the visit, especially the students.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 April 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards and achievement
- widen the curriculum to meet the full needs of all students
- improve the systems for monitoring the school's effectiveness.

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.

Standards have risen since the last inspection, reflecting improvements in teaching and learning. The proportion of students leaving school with five high grade GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, has risen by 10% and is well above average. Students are making good progress in most lessons and achieving well against challenging targets. Year 11 students have already gained GCSE passes and achieved verified results on vocational courses that indicate a considerable improvement in performance this year. Changes made to the curriculum in September 2008 are making a key contribution to these improvements.



Inspectors agreed with the school's lesson observation judgements that show widespread improvement in the quality of teaching. A strong focus on the development of students' independent learning skills has made teaching more interactive and effective. Teaching assistants are prepared well and used effectively to support and promote learning. Assessment is used increasingly well to enhance learning and the practice of students assessing their own and each other's work is integral to many lessons. Teachers have developed their questioning skills well. However, there are still inconsistencies in the quality of written feedback and the most able students are not sufficiently challenged in some of the weaker lessons.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum is much broader and has been enhanced by increased collaboration with other local schools and providers. The school offers a much wider range of vocational courses that are motivating students who prefer a practical approach to learning to achieve well. Three new diploma lines are also available for higher-attaining students who enjoy applied learning. The curriculum for lower-attaining students, and those in danger of becoming disaffected, has been strengthened giving them access to an improved range of qualifications. There are carefully devised long-term plans to ensure good progression routes post 16. Improvements have also been made to the Key Stage 3 curriculum that are encouraging students to develop their personal learning and thinking skills.

Systems for monitoring all aspects of the school's effectiveness have been tightened and middle leadership has been strengthened considerably over the last two years. Well-focused training has helped middle leaders become more skilled in monitoring and evaluation and they have been made accountable for the quality of the provision in their areas. This has led to more rapid identification of any underperformance, enabling support to be given quickly. The sharp focus given to improving the quality of teaching and learning is effective and systems for sharing best practice are working well.

The specialism has made a good contribution to improvements. The advanced skills teacher in science supports teachers across the school and the specialist team has been at the forefront of many developments, such as promoting the use of information and communication technology in teaching, developing personalised learning and gaining Healthy Schools accreditation. Science is increasingly embedded across the curriculum and both the science and mathematics departments work closely with local primary schools, supporting teachers and delivering short courses. In 2009 the school met its specialist targets at Key Stage 4 in science and mathematics.

The monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures that were found to be secure and meeting current requirements. The school has received good support from the local authority and the secondary strategies team that has helped improve the quality of teaching and learning. Senior leaders have also received outstanding support from their School Improvement Partner, particularly when tackling difficult staffing issues and restructuring management.

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

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector