

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 E Dawson  
Headteacher  
Sir John Thursby Community College  
Eastern Avenue  
Burnley  
Lancashire  
BB10 2AT

Dear Mrs Dawson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 February 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 13 and 14 February 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that improvements in the standards and achievement of current students are maintained and lead to better GCSE examination results
- improve the quality of teaching and learning and share good practice more effectively
- ensure consistency of practice in the marking and assessment of students' work.

After several years of working in outdated accommodation, the school recently moved into a new purpose-built building. Since the last inspection the school has acquired trust status; as a result, a new governing body was formed in September 2009.

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.

There have been clear gains in students' achievement. Attainment remains low, overall, but a rising trend is evident in almost all key measures. Attainment in some subjects, including science, is broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics is an example of how attainment has risen: where this measure stood

September 2009



at 26% at the time of the last inspection, unvalidated data suggest that this rose to 42% in 2009. The school's tracking records and early-entry examination results provide evidence that this improved attainment is likely to be broadly sustained. Students' progress relative to their starting points has improved considerably. Unvalidated data suggest that for the year group that took GCSEs in 2009, students from Pakistani and White British heritage made better progress than students from Bangladeshi heritage.

The measures introduced to improve teaching have had a clear impact, with appropriate support and training provided in key identified areas. Strategies for sharing good practice have been effective and welcomed by staff. Evidence provided by the school and verified by the inspection team indicates that the proportion of good or better lessons is increasing. Teaching in the school is characterised by clearly structured lessons, well-focused lesson objectives that are shared with students and appropriate tasks. Teachers and support staff establish good relationships with students. In weaker lessons teachers miss opportunities to exploit the potential of the interactive whiteboard and do not do enough to direct and monitor learning at different levels. Teachers' use of plenary activities to check understanding is underdeveloped. Students like working in the new building; they say they are learning more, and that they enjoy learning, particularly when they make use of laptops or undertake varied learning activities in lessons.

Teachers have broadened the range of assessment methods that they use and these have helped students to become more familiar with what is expected for a particular level or grade. Teachers mark key pieces of students' work, such as tests or projects, in great detail; they comment clearly on what has been done well, the standards reached and what could be better. However, the marking of day-to-day work remains variable in quality. In some cases, marking is cursory and teachers miss opportunities to promote learning through correcting spelling or specifying appropriate presentation.

A broad range of evidence suggests that the school's capacity to improve has been notably strengthened. Attainment has risen, including in the key areas of English and mathematics. In addition, the school has maintained and even slightly improved high levels of attendance and made a big reduction in the number of exclusions. Improvements in teaching and extra support structures mean that students feel increasingly involved in their learning and progress. The use of demanding targets has helped to raise aspirations and promote a culture of learning. Learning leaders are taking increasing responsibility for students' progress in their subject areas but currently give insufficient attention to monitoring the marking of students' routine written work. The school's self-evaluation, including the evaluation of teaching, is accurate and improvement planning is strong and well focused. The school has received effective support from the local authority and its National Challenge adviser in building its capacity to improve.

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

Paul Chambers  
Her Majesty's Inspector