

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
gtunncliffe@cftb.com



19 March 2010

Mr D Shield
Headteacher
Seaham School of Technology
Burnhall Drive
Seaham
County Durham
SR7 0EN

Dear Mr Shield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Seaham School of Technology

Following my visit with Jim Bennetts and Ray Biglin, additional inspectors, to your school on the 17 and 18 of March I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers – may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Durham Local Authority.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Seaham School of Technology

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the associate headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of students and representatives from the governing body and the local authority.

Context

A small number of staff have left or are about to leave the school. The school is advertising for their replacements. Consultants employed by the local authority are covering vacancies or providing additional support until permanent staff are appointed. The school is supported by an associate headteacher seconded from a secondary school in the authority; he works with the school for three days each week.

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

When students join the school their attainment is below average and they have weaknesses in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Students' attainment has fluctuated in recent years. In 2009 the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics was particularly low. The school has implemented strategies to improve the attainment of the current Year 11 cohort. Early evidence suggests that this has been successful. Nearly half of all Year 11 students have already attained an A* to C grade in English and one third have attained these grades in mathematics. This is encouraging but the school is aware that it must also improve the achievement of students in other year groups so that, in future years, there is less need for widespread interventions in Year 11.

Students did not progress well enough in the past and, as a result, some have a significant legacy of underachievement. For example, some students struggle to complete work that is appropriate for their age because they lack skills and knowledge that should have been acquired at an earlier stage. Many students lack independent learning skills and although they listen carefully to their teachers they are reluctant to answer questions or offer their opinions. They do as they are told in lessons but they do not routinely check their work or attempt to extend their knowledge and understanding. Some girls are very passive; this is particularly the case in science and mathematics lessons. The school is aware of this and is taking steps to improve matters. Students say that they prefer lessons that include practical or investigative tasks but they do not always have the skills to tackle this work effectively.



The school has focused on improving teachers' skills. In the best lessons students make good progress because they are given carefully structured tasks that require them to plan and carry out investigations or solve problems. These tasks are often carried out with the support of a partner and under the careful guidance of the teacher. In these lessons students make rapid progress and they enjoy learning. Students do not progress as well as this in all lessons because the tasks they are given do not always meet their needs. The pace of learning is sometimes too slow, particularly for the most able students, or too brisk because teachers do not make enough use of information from marking or from their assessments or observations of students' learning during lessons. As a result, some students complete tasks that add little value to their learning and others waste time consolidating skills that they have already mastered.

The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased and is now well above average. These students make the same progress as other groups during lessons. The school has further improved its system to track students' progress and it has ensured that this is applied to students in all year groups. The system is very flexible and provides data about the performance of groups and individuals. It helps teachers and middle leaders to identify and tackle underachievement and target additional support. Although some teacher assessments are still a little too generous, the tracking system is providing staff with useful information that is helping to drive the improvement process. Early information indicates that the least able students are making better progress than other groups. This is confirmed by information from work scrutiny and lesson observations.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science and ensure that all students make at least satisfactory progress by:
 - improving the quality of teaching and learning in these subjects
 - encouraging students to learn independently – satisfactory.

Other relevant outcomes for students

The school continues to encourage students to live healthy lifestyles. Students in Key Stage 3 stay on site at lunchtimes. Students understand that this helps to keep them safe and encourages them to make healthy choices at lunchtimes. Student voice is well established and students are consulted about a range of issues. Students are well supported at key points in their lives. Younger students say that the staff and older students look after them when they join the school and school staff support older students during their first days at further education colleges. The school has an off-site centre for students who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion. Students are taught at the centre for a few days and are then reintegrated into school. The proportion of students that do not go into employment, education or



training when they leave the school has declined significantly in recent years and it is now in line with the national average. Students' attendance is continuing to improve and the proportion of students that are persistent non-attenders is declining.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching has improved. Inadequate teaching is being eradicated and there is more good teaching than in the past. There is a new teaching and learning policy that provides teachers with clear guidance about the school's expectations. Staff have been provided with training and support, and teachers' professional development is well matched to the needs of departments and individuals. There is a regular cycle of lesson observation and work scrutiny and teachers receive feedback that helps them to improve their work. Teachers have accepted new ways of working very positively but, at this relatively early stage, there is some variation in their understanding of what is required. The school has introduced common systems for planning and delivering lessons. All teachers share learning objectives and success criteria with students. This helps students to understand what is expected of them but some teachers do not give enough consideration to how these objectives will be achieved. They do not think about how students will learn and they do not make enough use of information from marking and day-to-day assessment when planning lessons. As a result, the tasks given to students do not always meet their needs. In the best lessons teachers keep a close eye on the progress made by individual students. They provide individuals with well-targeted guidance and occasionally refocus the lesson when it becomes apparent that students lack the skills needed to reach the learning objectives. In weaker lessons teachers pursue learning objectives that add little value to students' learning because they do not realise that tasks are inappropriate or they lack the confidence to reshape the lesson. Students are beginning to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. This is at an early stage but when it is used well it helps students to identify where their work can be improved and to plan the actions that they will take.

The curriculum is satisfactory. 'Active learning days' encourage teachers to provide more interesting lessons and challenging activities. The school has maintained its range of after-school and enrichment activities. Students are well cared for and supported. There is a range of services that offer support to students of all abilities and help them deal with health issues or concerns. The school has implemented a very good range of rewards designed to encourage regular attendance.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - identifying clear lesson objectives and sharing them with students
 - increasing teachers' expectations of students



- ensuring that work is closely matched to the needs of all students – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The associate headteacher, assisted by staff from the local authority, is driving much of the school's improvement. This is helping the school to tackle successfully the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection. The school's improvement planning is thorough and provides a clear route through the early stages of special measures. This is very helpful. It ensures that the pace of improvement is brisk and that the school focuses on its most important priorities. The plan identifies how the work of the school will be monitored but it does not always identify how these activities will be carried out. The success of many activities is judged by how well actions have been completed rather than on their impact. It is not always clear how the information gathered from monitoring will be evaluated or what will be done as a result but it is clear that the plan is a working document and that it is regularly updated. The school's judgments about its current effectiveness are accurate and senior leaders have secure evidence to support their judgements.

Members of the substantive senior leadership team are fully involved in all decisions and planning about the school. It is difficult to judge how well they are contributing to the improvement process because the external support is very effective. Middle leaders are receiving support and have been provided with management systems that simplify some onerous tasks and allow them to keep a close eye on their departments. Senior leaders monitor the effectiveness with which middle leaders carry out their work and challenge any underperformance. The school is focusing much of its support on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. This has had a particularly positive impact on the mathematics department. Previously underperforming, it is now producing a high proportion of good lessons that help students to learn effectively.

The specialism is promoting students' attainment satisfactorily. The school is aware that there is potential for these subjects to make a much greater contribution to the improvement process. A new director of the specialism is to be appointed.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Increase the rigour with which the school evaluates its work, particularly the quality of teaching and learning, in order to bring about sustained improvement by:
 - ensuring that monitoring procedures are consistent across the school
 - developing the expertise of middle managers so the monitoring of their areas is sharply focused and leads to improvements in teaching and learning – satisfactory.



External support

The local authority is supporting the school very effectively. It has secured the services of an effective associate headteacher. He has established positive relationships with the substantive senior leadership team and with staff and through his energy and determination he is promoting improvement in many aspects of the school's work. He is managing this support effectively. He ensures that new initiatives are implemented and that staff know what is expected of them and then reduces his support and allows substantive leaders to manage the process. This makes good use of his time and it is helping to develop the capacity of middle leaders. Local authority consultants and inspectors are providing a great deal of day-to-day support. This has enabled the school to provide extra teaching groups in Year 11, to improve the effectiveness of key departments and to implement a range of improvement strategies. The School Improvement Partner provides additional challenge. His skills and expertise are well matched to the school's needs. The school's progress is monitored by a local authority steering group. Roles and responsibilities are carefully defined and additional support is agreed with the school and is targeted towards key areas of priority. This ensures that staff are not overburdened.

The local authority's statement of action is closely aligned to the school's raising achievement plan and it is reviewed regularly. The local authority hopes that the school will be removed from special measures by December 2010. It intends to reduce its support to the school from July 2010 but it will continue to monitor the school closely and it will provide additional support if needed.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue to focus on the priorities identified during the last inspection. It should ensure that teachers' planning is based on information from day-to-day and longer-term assessment and that teachers focus on how students will learn and what they will need to do to reach the lesson objectives.

