

CfBT Inspection Services T 0300 1231231  
Suite 22 [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
West Lancs Investment Centre [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

**Direct T** 01695 566934  
**Direct F** 01695 729320  
[gtunncliffe@cfbt.com](mailto:gtunncliffe@cfbt.com)  
[www.cfbt-inspections.com](http://www.cfbt-inspections.com)



05 Apr 2011

Mrs L White  
Interim Headteacher  
Berwick Middle School  
Lovaine Terrace  
Berwick-upon-Tweed  
Northumberland  
TD15 1LA

Dear Mrs White,

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Berwick Middle School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 April 2011 and for the information provided during the inspection. Please convey my thanks, also, to the Chair and vice chair of the Governing Body and the local authority officer for finding time to talk with me, and the staff and students I met in lessons and around the school during the day

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has retired and an interim headteacher appointed for the spring and summer terms 2011. A new full-time headteacher has been appointed to start in post from September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 5–6 October 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

At the time of the previous inspection, attainment was average and achievement satisfactory. A similar picture exists, although the collection and analyses of students' performance data has improved and the school is now better placed to know, more accurately, how well the students are progressing in their learning relative to their start points at the school at the beginning of Year 5.

Senior leaders and managers, together with the local authority, acted quickly to address the identified weakness in safeguarding raised at the time of the previous inspection. The single central register contains all the required information, but minor editing is required to the level of detail pertaining to the use of Northumberland County Council supply staff. There are improved systems for site security and clearer methods for supervising the students when in school. New fences have been erected in areas where there were possible safety

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risks to the students. Although all reasonable actions have now been taken to safeguard the students, there is no overall health and safety risk assessment for the school site.

The roles of senior leaders and managers are now clearer in terms of their responsibilities for evaluating and monitoring aspects of the school's provision. However, while there has been an increased range of activities relating to lesson observations and scrutiny of teachers' planning, this has yet to be coordinated fully across each of the senior leaders. The style of the lessons observations carried out by senior staff is thorough and considered very helpful by teachers, but the current use of an extended pro-forma list can limit the opportunity for constructive written evaluation about particular aspects of teaching and learning. This format also makes it more difficult to conduct a 'themed lesson observation', which relates to a particular priority or action from the school's improvement plan.

The role of the governing body in holding the school to account is progressing satisfactorily. Specific governor training to target a range of strategies focusing on monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work has recently started. Those members of the governing body who spoke with the inspector believe that this is already helping them to focus their attention more specifically on the essential aspects of their roles, which will enable the governing body as a whole to challenge and support the school more effectively than it did previously.

The school-based initiatives to support the sharing of effective lesson practice are progressing well. Staff are developing their understanding of those characteristics, which make for effective teaching and learning, especially in relation to pace and relevance of lesson content for students of all abilities. Teachers have welcomed these initiatives because they are giving them greater confidence in knowing how well they are doing in their teaching, and what they can do further to make it even better.

The quality of the external support has been appreciated by senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, and has clearly helped to build a greater level of confidence within the school. Teachers appreciate the quality of the specialist external support provided, and feel that this has helped them to be more critically aware about their teaching and other aspects of their work at the school. The local authority statement of action plan, which was written shortly after the school was given a notice to improve, was judged by Ofsted to need some improvements. There are now clearer timescales, which link more effectively to the life of the plan, and better defined roles for officers to monitor progress, especially the balance between the focused roles of the School Improvement Partner and senior local authority staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Mr Brian Blake  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

January 2011



## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 04 – 05 October 2010**

- Take urgent action to fully meet all requirements for safeguarding pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of senior leadership and management so that:
  - there is clear vision and direction for school improvement that is shared with all staff
  - roles and accountability are delegated and made clear to staff, with recognition of the time needed away from classroom duties to monitor and evaluate the school's work.
- Improve the governing body's knowledge of the school through regular monitoring so it improves its capacity to guide improvement.
- Capture and share good practice in teaching and learning so that all pupils benefit from consistently good quality provision.