

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

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 01695 566932  
**Direct F** 01695 729320  
**Direct email:**  
hcarroll@cfbt.com



14 May 2012

Mr P Fitzpatrick  
Executive Headteacher  
Birkdale High School  
Windy Harbour Road  
Birkdale  
Southport  
Merseyside  
PR8 3DT

Dear Mr Fitzpatrick

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Birkdale High School**

Following my visit with Kathleen Harris and Derek Barnes, additional inspectors, to your school on 10 and 11 May 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

One Newly Qualified Teacher may be appointed to each of the following subject areas: English and mathematics.

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 and the Chair of the Governing Body

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey  
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2011**

- Accelerate progress in learning to that which is good for all groups of students by:
  - ensuring that suitably challenging targets are used consistently to plan learning opportunities
  - creating robust systems for tracking students' progress in order to identify underperformance early and introduce appropriate learning support.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching and use of assessment information so that they are consistently good by:
  - sharing good practice
  - establishing the effective use of assessment to support learning, including the use of targets and feedback through marking
  - creating more opportunities for effective independent learning
  - ensuring that students of all abilities receive suitable learning support and challenge so that they are able to make at least good progress.
  
- Plan and implement an effective system of self-evaluation by:
  - creating a cycle of monitoring, evaluation and review
  - ensuring that staff receive accurate and pertinent feedback from lesson observations which will highlight strengths and areas for improvement
  - involving the governing body directly in robust monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement plan.
  
- Improve behaviour to be at least satisfactory by:
  - ensuring that high expectations are consistently applied in lessons and around the school.

## **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Birkdale High School**

### **Report from the first monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 May 2012**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other nominated staff, groups of students, the Chair and additional representatives of the governing body. In addition, a telephone conversation was held with one parent who contacted Ofsted during the inspection.

#### **Context**

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has left the school. An executive headteacher has been appointed who took up post on 8 May 2012. He will remain at the school until the appointment of a new substantive headteacher. One of the two deputy headteachers was absent during the inspection. Currently, the school has a small number of vacancies and a recruitment drive is underway to appoint suitable qualified teachers for the new academic year starting in September.

#### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Assessment information provided by leaders confirms that students do not achieve as well as they should by the end of Year 11. Data indicate, in particular, that students in Key Stage 3 are losing ground, over time, in too many subjects. This means that, without significant additional support during Years 10 and 11, students are less likely to achieve their full potential by the time they leave the school. Although significant variation persists in students' achievement between subjects at Key Stage 4, some strengths exist. For example, results attained by current Year 11 students, following early entry to mathematics GCSE examinations, indicate a positive outcome that demonstrates the impact of effective teaching on raising attainment.

In lessons, the pace of learning is variable and reflects the quality of teaching. Students make the most rapid progress where they are able to work independently to meet precise and challenging learning goals. For example, where progress was outstanding in a technology lesson, the boys worked swiftly and effectively during a practical activity because, 'the teacher wants high standards and tells you how to get them'. Students make good progress where activities are relevant and good quality resources are used imaginatively to extend their knowledge and understanding, for example through group activities and paired discussion. However, progress slows where the teacher controls the pace of learning too much or where activities are not sufficiently engaging. Occasionally, students are given too little responsibility for their own learning and are not challenged or stretched enough to make the progress they should.

Leaders acknowledge that, while systems exist to gather data about students' progress, they are not confident that data sets are complete or fully reliable. The senior leader who has recently taken responsibility for tracking students' progress has begun to trial different methods to set targets and record assessment information. However, these strategies are at an early stage of development and do not currently provide the means by which staff can set suitably challenging targets or evaluate students' progress accurately to inform planning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Accelerate progress in learning to that which is good for all groups of students – inadequate

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection due to the implementation of a range of initiatives. For example, a common format to plan lessons has been established that has increased teachers' focus on students' progress throughout the lesson.

Consequently, most lessons are characterised by regular checks, including peer and self-assessment, to establish whether students are on track to achieve learning goals. However, the impact of ongoing assessments to support learning is variable. This is because learning objectives are not always suitably challenging and in some instances, peer assessment does not require students to use agreed success criteria to evaluate the progress being made. A new policy has been introduced to achieve greater consistency in the quality of marking. Students reported that marking is more helpful in identifying what they have achieved and the next steps required to improve their work. However, they also indicated that feedback is still variable between subjects.

Three teacher 'coaches' have been identified, each of whom has a focus on improving different aspects of teaching and learning. As a result of some targeted support, the proportion of inadequate teaching has reduced. However, the impact of this promising initiative has been limited as insufficient time has been allocated to ensure that agreed plans can be implemented fully.

Good or better teaching observed during the inspection was characterised by the creative use of imaginative resources that stimulated discussion and promoted independent learning. Teachers acted as good role models, providing helpful demonstrations that enabled students to take responsibility for their learning at an early stage in the lesson and the effective use of questioning probed and challenged students' understanding of new concepts. Teaching was less effective where students were over-directed and given too little opportunity to participate actively in their learning. Informal discussions, between inspectors and students during lessons, indicated that boys could articulate their views clearly and provide detailed responses to tasks set. However, opportunities were sometimes missed for students to share their ideas with a wider audience, for example as part of a review of progress. On occasion, students were presented with activities with which they were unfamiliar and were unsure how to respond. Where teaching was inadequate, it was because activities were not

tailored to meet students' needs and so their progress was limited. Occasionally, teaching was hindered by faulty equipment and resources that acted as an obstacle to learning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and use of assessment information so that they are consistently good – satisfactory

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour in lessons and around school has improved as a result of teachers' higher expectations and a more consistent application of the behaviour policy. During the inspection, behaviour was never less than satisfactory and often good; students also reported that lessons are disrupted less frequently by inappropriate behaviour. These improvements are reflected in a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions and referrals from lessons for behavioural incidents. However, staff acknowledge that some inconsistencies remain in the management of behaviour and, on occasion, the poor behaviour of a small core of students remains a barrier to progress.

Attitudes to learning are generally positive, particularly where teaching is engaging and activities relevant. For example, in a Year 9 physical education lesson where two classes had been combined due to inclement weather, groups of boys collaborated together very well in the sports hall, participating enthusiastically in a range of athletics and field activities. Students generally remain compliant where teaching is less inspiring and respond appropriately, but without enthusiasm, to instructions given.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve behaviour to be at least satisfactory – satisfactory

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Senior leaders have experienced a period of significant upheaval and change since the last inspection. Consequently, a strategic approach to school improvement has not been established. Lines of accountability within the senior leadership team have not been strengthened sufficiently to enable improvement plans to be implemented rigorously. This is exemplified by the absence of a programme of staff professional development that is targeted effectively to improve the quality of teaching and achieve consistency in behaviour management. Furthermore, systems to track students' progress reliably are insecure and structures to monitor and evaluate progress systematically are underdeveloped.

Although whole-school self-evaluation is at an embryonic stage of development, the role of middle leaders has been instrumental in securing some early improvements in teaching and behaviour. Subject leaders have benefited from external support brokered by governors and have gained a more accurate view of the quality of teaching in their subject area. They have also monitored students' workbooks and reviewed assessment information. However, during discussions, middle leaders raised concerns about the consistency of their approach

between subjects. This is because no time has been allocated for leaders to share best practice or quality assure their monitoring and evaluation procedures.

The Chair of the Governing Body has a clear vision for the future and has established a 'challenge board' to monitor the school's progress. Governors have used the outcomes of visits by external partners and consultants to challenge and manage significant weaknesses in school leadership. They have also identified their own training needs to enable them to hold leaders to account more rigorously for students' performance in the future.

The post-Ofsted action plan sets out a series of actions to respond to key priorities. However, while these are well intentioned and include some measurable success criteria, the plans lack rigour. There are too few interim milestones by which to check progress in the short and medium term and the plan does not make clear what will be monitored or evaluated and how. Senior leaders and governors recognise that there has already been some slippage in the implementation of the plan because, in places, it is too ambitious in terms of what can be achieved within given timescales. The appointment of the executive headteacher has provided an opportunity for leaders and governors to establish the key priorities and take robust action to secure sustainable improvement.

Although very new to his post, the executive headteacher has already begun to establish positive working relationships with both students and staff. A strong commitment exists within the school community to tackle the key priorities identified at the last inspection and the 'green shoots' of recovery evident in teaching and students' behaviour reflect a growing momentum of improvement.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Plan and implement an effective system of self-evaluation – inadequate

### **External support**

The governing body has brokered support from a range of external partners which has provided them with an accurate view of the impact of provision and leadership on students' outcomes. Governors have valued the feedback from this support as it has enabled them to overcome barriers to improvement and establish a baseline from which to evaluate future progress. In particular, a visit by School Improvement Officers from a neighbouring local authority has helped leaders to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and begin to tackle underperformance. Arrangements have also been made for leaders to visit other secondary schools, for example, to support plans to improve target-setting and tracking progress. The statement of action was judged by HMI to be fit for purpose and the associated plan is now under review following recent changes to leadership.

### **Priorities for further improvement are for leaders to:**

- establish accurate and reliable procedures to set targets and track students' progress
- eradicate inadequate teaching.
- implement rigorous procedures for whole-school self-evaluation.