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1 March 2013

Mr Phil Fitzpatrick  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Fitzpatrick

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

Following my visit with Patrick Geraghty Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 27 and 28 February 2013, 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 third 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 third monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 February 2013**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other nominated staff, groups of students, the Chair and other representatives of the governing body.

#### **Context**

The deputy headteacher retired from his post in December 2012. An acting assistant headteacher has been appointed from within the staff to take joint responsibility for aspects of teaching and learning. The Chair of the Governing Body has stepped down and a new Chair has been elected. Additional governors have also been appointed since the last monitoring inspection.

#### **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

Published unvalidated data reflect students' past underachievement and indicate that, in 2012, too many boys did not attain the standards of which they were capable by the end of Key Stage 4. However, gaps are closing in students' knowledge and skills as a result of improvements in teaching and a greater understanding of the boys' individual needs. Nevertheless, leaders acknowledge that some variations persist in the performance of different groups of students between year groups and subjects and, in particular, those of middle ability.

A number of developments since the last monitoring inspection are contributing well to raising standards. A simplified and reliable system to track students' progress has been established for all year groups. This helps teachers to identify where boys are falling behind in their learning and to adapt lesson planning to accelerate their progress. The 'Help and Support Strategy' is proving effective in targeting and tailoring strategies to meet specific learning needs for individuals and groups of students. While further time is needed to evaluate the impact of this initiative, early indications suggest that this rigorous approach is having a beneficial impact on students' progress. Support for students with special educational needs, including those who are gifted and talented and who are new to speaking English, has been transformed since the last monitoring inspection. New arrangements for the deployment of teaching assistants and recent developments in 'The Hub' allow staff to adopt a more personalised approach to learning support that focuses sharply on specific, individual learning needs.

In lessons the pace of learning is increasing. This is because teaching offers more opportunities for students to work collaboratively on practical activities that engage them in their learning and provide greater challenge. However, in some lessons teachers control the

pace of learning for too long and accept responses from students that do not always reflect their true academic potential. Opportunities are missed for boys to develop a 'love for learning' through imaginative activities that stretch and extend their knowledge.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

### **The quality of teaching**

Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and more teaching is of good quality. A positive climate for learning has been established which means that disruptions to teaching are rare. More challenging targets have been set which have raised teachers' expectations about what students should and can achieve. Good practice is shared routinely by staff, for example through 'Wow Wednesdays', and students enjoy a broader variety of activities that engage them more actively in their learning. Students value the opportunity to work in groups and feel that they generally learn more as a result. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson boys engaged with each other well in a very challenging and analytical dialogue on the Cold War. In a Year 9 English lesson groups of boys worked collaboratively, coaching and challenging each other to deepen their understanding about the poem they were evaluating. The use of 'class leaders' is also providing more opportunities for students to challenge and be challenged in their learning, which is helping to increase their independent learning and communication skills. Students often work together on paired activities and grow in self-confidence as a result. However, at times, checks by the teacher do not ensure that all students have contributed as fully as they might to paired work or reached joint conclusions that extend their knowledge and understanding.

Students' work is marked more regularly and good examples provide clear signposts for students to help them improve. However, inconsistencies remain in the quality and impact of marking. For example, some comments do not identify 'next steps' and boys do not routinely reflect or act on the feedback they are given in all subjects.

A whole-academy focus on improving literacy has raised students' awareness of the importance of using correct spelling and grammar and improving their subject-specific vocabulary. A dedicated time is allocated for private reading each week. However, too often students do not read texts that improve their language development or challenge their thinking.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

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

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy is no longer a cause for concern. Boys report that there is a good atmosphere within the academy and that in lessons

learning is rarely disrupted. Students benefit from an effective system that has been implemented to identify and tackle any concerns relating to behaviour or attitudes. Routines to promote positive behaviour for learning are becoming more established. For example, in practical science lessons observed, students consistently demonstrated mature attitudes to setting up and using equipment to conduct their investigations. However, students do not all have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills as independent learners or to take full advantage of their other individual skills and talents to extend their learning.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve behaviour to be at least satisfactory – good

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

Leadership at all levels is being strengthened through the transformational culture that has been established by the headteacher. Systems and structures to drive improvement more quickly are becoming embedded so that staff have a better understanding of what is working well and where further action is needed to ensure that all students achieve as well as they should.

Senior leadership roles have been realigned and clear lines of accountability ensure that structures to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve teaching and learning are thorough and accurate. Reviews of progress by senior leaders have informed decisions taken to implement a raft of initiatives to raise achievement, improve the quality of teaching and promote positive behaviour for learning. While it is too soon to evaluate the impact of recently introduced strategies, current assessment information demonstrates that students' achievements are rising, although some inconsistencies remain.

Subject leaders are taking greater responsibility for students' performance; they have welcomed the more user-friendly assessment information available that enables them to account for students' progress in their subject more effectively. However, at present there is no formal opportunity for this group of leaders to share and develop practice further between subjects.

Recent changes to personnel in the governing body have provided an opportunity for governors to reflect on their role in holding the academy to account. Presentations by senior leaders and visits to the academy are increasing governors' knowledge of the work of the academy. Minutes of the governors' Progress Board meetings indicate that they are focused more sharply on the work of the academy and its impact on students' achievement. Governors recognise that, while much progress has been made, there is still work to be done to achieve challenging goals for the future.

A learning community is becoming established across the academy that includes both staff and students. Good contributions to ongoing professional development by staff at all levels reflect their strong commitment to their students and to improving the quality of teaching and its impact on learning.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- plan and implement an effective system of self-evaluation – good

### **External support**

Governors, including the recently appointed Chair and those who are new to the governing body, have benefited from training provided by external consultants to develop their roles of accountability. Recent workshops on the interpretation of data and procedures for safeguarding students have strengthened their knowledge so that they are better equipped to ask more searching questions of leaders about the academy's performance.