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6 June 2013

Mr Phil Fitzpatrick  
Principal  
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 Janet Palmer Her Majesty's Inspector and Andrew Henderson, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 4 and 5 June, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy 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

Patrick Geraghty  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **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 fourth monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 June 2013**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other nominated staff, groups of students, the Chair and other representatives of the Governing Body.

#### **Context**

Since the third monitoring visit in February 2013 one new appointment has been made to the senior leadership team; an assistant principal with responsibility for data analysis and teaching and learning. New parent governors have been appointed to the governing body.

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

Year 10 and 11 students are currently making good progress. The most recent academy progress data and results from examinations already taken and marked, indicate, that there will be a significant improvement at GCSE 5 A\* to C including English and mathematics in August 2013. Academy leaders recognise the imperative of achieving significantly improved GCSE results in 2013. In particular, gaps between distinctive groups of students, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals and middle ability boys, need to be narrowed. Recent progress data indicate that this is happening. The academy is placing a strong focus on the achievement of higher grades at GCSE and these initiatives need to be accelerated further so that all boys reach their expected potential and many exceed it.

Good tracking and monitoring systems are leading to better focused intervention at Key Stage 4. Data are used more effectively at all levels to evaluate student progress. Target setting is becoming more refined. However, the academy acknowledges the need to develop further a stronger aspirational culture around student target setting. Academy leaders recognise that further work is required to enable sustained and embedded progress at Key Stage 3. This requires the further enrichment of the key stage curriculum to develop independent learning, reading, writing and oracy skills. A stronger academy reading culture has been established and a number of students enthusiastically described their reading practice and membership of academy book clubs. A new oracy strategy has been developed but needs a greater commitment by all teachers across all provision.

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**

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. On this visit many good and a few outstanding sessions were observed. In the best lessons, students are given numerous opportunities to air and explore their knowledge, to question, develop reflective skills and progress their understanding. Regular checks on learning reinforce knowledge. Teachers use praise and encouragement to promote high expectations. Lessons started and were conducted at a brisk pace. In these better lessons teachers used resources effectively to extend students' learning and help them to consolidate and stretch their understanding. Students developed confidence through effective questioning and their independent thinking skills were well developed through well planned pair and group work.

In a minority of lessons students are not sufficiently challenged to develop independent leaning skills. Teachers do not always use an appropriate range of activities to engage all pupils. Opportunities to work collaboratively or reinforce learning are limited. Students very clearly expressed their desire for further challenge in lessons.

In the best marking, students' work showed how they had used marking tips to improve and develop their knowledge. In the few lessons where marking was less strong students were not given pointers to the next steps to improvement and there was no evidence of teacher follow up to assess improvement.

A more open culture of sharing the best practice is developing but requires further acceleration; more teaching needs to be outstanding.

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**

The behaviour of boys is good. Students demonstrate a strong desire to learn and to be more fully engaged in learning: they seek greater responsibilities and involvement in all aspects of academy life. Students are highly cooperative with each other and adults.

Students conduct themselves in a calm and positive manner. They now take a great pride in the academy and many demonstrate developing leadership qualities. A new rewards system has been launched across the academy which has been well received by students. Students are ambitious. One student aptly captured the views of the many in stating 'We only want rewards for exceeding our targets and not for meeting them'.

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 school**

The Principal provides excellent leadership with a strong focus on improvement and a philosophy based on trust and mutual respect. He has energised senior leaders, staff and students to focus on the building of an achievement and aspirational culture. He is very astute in realising that much still needs to be done. He is fully supported by staff and students alike; all acknowledge and appreciate his transformational impact on the academy. He is increasingly supported by a new and ambitious senior leadership team.

Middle management has been strengthened. Middle managers now form a strong and influential group that are beginning to develop ideas and strategies to improve students' outcomes, the quality of teaching and learning and the better engagement of students. Work is continuing to strengthen this group further through more regular meetings and establishing mechanisms to report their views and proposed initiatives directly to the Principal. Improvement planning is clear, accurate and realistic. Systems for tracking and monitoring student progress have been improved. Staff at all levels are more accountable and performance management is robust. Improvement planning and monitoring are sharper.

Students are taking a greater responsibility throughout academy life; the boys relish involvement in such activities. Academy leaders acknowledge that more regular consultations of students' views on teaching and learning would be beneficial to the academy's objectives of sustained and accelerated improvement.

New parent governors have been appointed. Under a new Chair the focus on interrogating performance trends has become more rigorous. The governors acknowledge the need to ensure that present stability in academy leadership is both secured for the future and further strengthened.

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

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

## **External support**

Governors continue to benefit from training provided by external consultants to develop their roles of accountability. The academy is currently in discussions with training consultants on programmes to explore approaches to increase the percentage of outstanding teaching.