

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01216 799164
Direct email: tim.ogbourn@serco.com



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Claire Gilbert
Headteacher
Wednesfield High School, A Specialist Engineering College
Lichfield Road
Wednesfield
Wolverhampton
WV11 3ES

Dear Mrs Gilbert

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wednesfield High School, A Specialist Engineering College

Following my visit with Terence Payne and Helen Owen, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 2–3 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint any newly qualified teachers in mathematics but may appoint newly qualified teachers to other subjects.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently at least good, by ensuring that teachers:
 - always plan engaging activities and prepare resources that are closely matched to students' differing abilities and needs, particularly to challenge those of the highest ability
 - frequently evaluate the progress made by students during a lesson
 - quickly move students on in their learning once they show understanding, and provide support for those who need it, so that a good pace of learning is maintained and no time is wasted
 - inform students clearly through written marking how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - give students opportunities to respond to advice by attempting a new challenge or practising skills, so they can reach and exceed their targets.

- In mathematics, make sure all students make good or better progress in lessons, so that attainment rises to at least national averages, by:
 - improving the quality of teaching so it is consistently good or outstanding
 - securing effective leadership of the department
 - ensuring that assessments of students' work and progress are accurate.

- Ensure that teaching in the sixth form is consistently at least good and the courses provided closely match students' needs, so they achieve equally well in all subjects.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, ensuring that:
 - rigorous self-evaluation leads to prompt identification of areas of weakness, and fast and appropriate action is taken to address them
 - leaders, including governors, evaluate more rigorously the impact of pupil premium funding so that the gap in achievement between this group and their peers is rapidly closed
 - governors provide effective challenge for the school's leaders, checking on levels of progress and comparing them to national levels
 - teachers and leaders at all levels are fully held to account for their students' progress by linking pay rises and promotion more closely to performance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2–3 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders, five representatives from the governing body, a representative from Education Central who was representing the local authority, and a group of sixth form students. Due to the timing of the inspection, it was not possible to observe any teaching and learning in Year 11 or Year 13. Year 12 students were involved in sixth form curriculum enrichment for one day of the inspection. Twenty lessons were observed, including three which were observed jointly with senior leaders, and a number of other short visits were made to lessons. Inspectors spoke with students during lessons and at lunchtime, and an inspector also met formally with a group of students from the sixth form.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in March, the deputy headteacher, who was at that time on maternity leave, has now returned. The temporary leadership structure, introduced to cover the absence of this senior leader, will continue until the end of this academic year. A new director of mathematics has been appointed for September, but this person was able to start their new post early on 23 June 2014. A new head of mathematics has also been appointed and will start in September, with responsibility to improve teaching and learning in mathematics. There is still one vacant post for a main-scale teacher in mathematics. The school is at the advanced stages of plans to convert to an academy, with this transition due to take place on 1 September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement in mathematics remains inadequate. Most students do not make enough progress in this subject and reach standards that are too low. The slow progress seen in previous years for lower- and middle-ability students continues.

Students who are supported by the pupil premium continue to make much less progress and attain much lower standards than others in mathematics and across the school. Predictions for 2014 GCSE results indicate that standards for these students will, once again, be lower than those not eligible for the pupil premium. In mathematics, the already wide gap in progress is set to widen even further.

Achievement in the sixth form is improving. Subject weaknesses have been addressed and several courses, including travel and tourism and food technology, have been removed from the curriculum and replaced with courses which are more appropriate to the needs of students, such as geography and hospitality and catering. Close monitoring by senior leaders is having an impact on raising

attainment, particularly at the highest grades A* to B in A-level and AS-level chemistry and psychology and AS-level product design. Achievement in work-related learning courses continues to be strong.

Achievement at Key Stage 3 remains a grave cause for concern. In Year 9, about a third of students are not making the progress that is expected of them from Key Stage 2 in English and in science. In mathematics, this figure rises to around half of the cohort. Students are not adequately prepared for their studies at GCSE as they do not have the necessary foundations in place. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson for lower-ability students, inspectors observed that they were unable to identify simple unitary fractions such as a half, a third or a quarter.

The school has not yet taken steps to make sure that assessment information is accurate and the headteacher shared concerns that the Key Stage 3 information, especially in mathematics, may not be correct.

In lessons, students make uneven progress because some teachers do not insist on high enough standards. Slow progress was seen in mathematics and science lessons where poor presentation in written work led to inaccuracies. Inspectors saw stages missed in working out, graphs being accepted without axes labelled properly, diagrams not being drawn accurately and lines drawn without using a ruler.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving, but not yet at a fast enough rate. There are still too many lessons where teachers do not have high enough expectations, which leads to work and activities being planned that are not sufficiently challenging for all students. Too much time is spent in repeating work that has already been mastered, with the result that students learn little that is new. Superficial checks on learning are carried out during lessons and sometimes teachers do not use this information to change the activities that have been planned in response to feedback from students. Teaching, especially in mathematics, does not recognise what students can already do and build on this. Recent staffing changes in the mathematics department have led to a lack of continuity for many students and some topics have been left unfinished or students given new books to start the work with a new teacher.

Most teachers understand the need to improve their teaching and are willing to try out new ideas that others have found to be successful. Inspectors were able to see the early signs of impact of strategies to improve the quality of teaching across many subjects in the school. Improvements in marking were seen in students receiving detailed advice on how to improve their work. High-quality marking in English and history is ensuring that students make much better progress as a result of students doing what teachers have asked them to do and teachers making sure that this is done. Good progress was seen in physical education and in sociology

lessons, where students were used to being asked to explain their answers further and where teachers required students to think hard about their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and safety were judged to be good at the full inspection in December. Since then, attendance has improved to close to national figures and the number of students who are persistently absent is reducing. There is also a reduction in the number of students who have been excluded.

School leaders have recently carried out an evaluation of the impact of the use of off-site alternative provision. This was not making sufficient difference to the progress of students who attended these alternative providers. From September, school leaders are planning to set up their own 'learning inclusion centre' to support students who are at risk of exclusion. The aim is to help students to manage their behaviours while continuing with their chosen courses of study.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Improvements in mathematics are not happening quickly enough. School leaders are aware of this. Interim arrangements for the leadership of the department have been in place through a subject leader with a technology background. Two teachers of mathematics recently left the school and temporary arrangements have involved the use of non-specialists, supply teachers, and also moving teachers between groups. The newly appointed director of mathematics has now started in post and there is currently just one vacancy for a mathematics teacher still to be filled. Greater stability in mathematics staffing is indicated from September, at which point the new leaders of mathematics should be in a better position to drive improvements in teaching and learning in mathematics.

Judgements made by school leaders on the quality of teaching have been over-generous. Observations of teaching have happened too infrequently and have not considered the impact of teaching on learning. More frequent, recent observations of teaching are giving school leaders a more accurate view of the quality of teaching across the school. Assessment and progress information is still not used sufficiently in making these judgements because school leaders are not confident that this data is accurate.

The headteacher and governors have acted to improve teaching through a combination of challenge and support through professional development. Where teaching is not good enough, plans to work with these teachers are not yet sharp enough. Clear targets need to be set which are regularly monitored so that these teachers improve quickly.

At Key Stage 4, school leaders know which students or groups are underachieving. Teachers are making better use of assessment data through far more rigorous monitoring and tracking of students' progress. They use this information to plan ways to accelerate progress. Leaders check on the impact of these interventions and change them if they are not making enough of a difference. This same approach to monitoring cannot be used at Key Stage 3 due to concerns about the accuracy of the assessment information.

Self-evaluation is now more accurate and represents a realistic view of the school's performance and the work still to be done. Action plans are sharply focused and deadlines clearly set to show when particular aspects will be reviewed and reports presented to governors' monitoring groups. Senior leaders with responsibility for these areas regularly present reports to governors, who are now in a stronger position to hold these leaders to account for their improvement areas.

The governing body has been restructured into three new committees as a result of actions recommended in the report written following the external review of governance. Governors have recently received training on using performance data and also on performance-related pay for teachers.

External support

External reviews of the school are rigorous and accurate in their conclusions. These have been carried out by Education Central, as commissioned by the local authority as part of its challenge and support role, and a consultant working with the mathematics department. Support from external partners is having some impact, such as improvements seen to the systems for monitoring students' progress across the school. Sixth form use of assessment information is far more effective as a result of support from a partner school for the leader of sixth form on introducing new systems. Support from a science specialist leader of education, to start in September, has been organised through Education Central.

Priorities for further improvement

- Senior leaders should take urgent action to check that teacher assessments are accurate and ensure that regular moderation activities take place in all subjects.