

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 618 8524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/ofsted

Direct T 01695 566932

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: hcarnall@cfbt.com



2 July 2015

Mr Ian Evans
Headteacher
Highfield Humanities College
Highfield Road
Blackpool
Lancashire
FY4 3JZ

Dear Mr Evans

Special measures monitoring inspection of Highfield Humanities College

Following my visit with Andrew Henderson and Peter McKay, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 30 June and 1 July 2015, 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 October 2014. 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection in English, mathematics and humanities (history, geography and religious studies). Inspectors are of the view that there is the capacity to support NQTs within these areas. The school has agreed that these NQTs will also be supported by a designated member of the senior leadership team and have additional support through the local authority and the teaching school alliance partnership.

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 and the Director of People for Blackpool.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2014

- Improve teaching, in order to raise the achievement of all students, but particularly for boys, disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs by:
 - ensuring all teachers have very high expectations, both of what students can achieve, and also of how students should behave and present their work at all times
 - rapidly ensuring that teachers gain an accurate understanding of students' current achievement in all subjects
 - ensuring teachers use available information to plan lessons that are engaging, and challenge students of all abilities to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of their subjects
 - ensuring students have regular opportunities to practise and develop the basic skills they need in literacy and mathematics
 - ensuring that all teachers regularly mark students' work, provide students with clear guidance on how to improve their learning, and check that this happens.

- Improve students' behaviour in lessons by:
 - providing more inspiring learning opportunities to motivate students and raise their expectations about how much they can achieve
 - improving students' understanding of the impact poor behaviour has on the progress they make.

- Urgently secure students' safety by:
 - working closely with students to review how the school deals with bullying, and build confidence across the whole school community that bullying will be dealt with quickly and effectively
 - working closely with students and their families to improve attendance so that it rapidly increases to be at least in line with the national average.

- Improve the effectiveness and impact of leaders, including governors, by:
 - ensuring all leaders communicate an uncompromising vision of excellence for all aspects of the school's work
 - quickly securing an accurate assessment of students' achievements across all subjects and year groups, and using this to improve teaching and school improvement planning
 - ensuring that leaders take effective steps to support staff in securing a consistent approach to managing behaviour
 - ensuring leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is based on a thorough and frank analysis of student outcomes, and that this directly informs strategic improvement planning.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 30 June and 1 July 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, headteacher designate, other senior leaders, middle managers and teachers. Inspectors met with two groups of students and talked with many during breaks and lunchtime. Several learning walks of the school (short visits to a range of lessons) were conducted with a special focus on student behaviour. Inspectors also met with the Chair and one other member of the Governing Body, school-based consultants commissioned by the local authority to support the school improvement agenda and two representatives of the local authority.

Context

The current headteacher retires at the end of August 2015. A new headteacher designate has been appointed and takes up the post on 1 September 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Current school data indicate that a historic downward trend in the percentage of students who attain five GCSE A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been halted. Present Year 11 students are predicted to achieve at or slightly above that achieved by the 2013/14 cohort. Senior leaders recognise and inspectors emphasised the imperative of a rapid and sustained rise in the percentage of students achieving five GCSE A* to C, including English and mathematics. Students enter the school with prior attainment at the national average and should be achieving better results by the end of Key Stage 4. Senior leaders also recognise that more students should achieve the higher grades at GCSE so as to reflect better the significant cohort of more able students within the school.

Students in Years 11 and 10 are making better progress in English and mathematics. School leaders accept that this improving trend must also be sustained and accelerated more rapidly. School data indicate that the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers is narrowing and that better focused strategies to tackle the learning needs of these students are having an impact. Boys are making better progress and many are demonstrating more positive attitudes in class and around the school. Re-focused and effective changes to the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs are having a positive impact and these students are now making improved progress. Students are making better progress at Key Stage 3. In particular, Year 9 students have embraced curriculum changes that have offered greater challenge and extended learning opportunities.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved. However, there remains a substantial minority of lessons in which the learning needs of all students are not fully met. Good teaching and learning are characterised by activities that are well planned to meet the learning

needs of all students. Skilful teacher questioning elicits deeper thinking and reasoning by students and extends their understanding of the topic. In these lessons students are actively engaged and keen to learn and they make good progress. In too many lessons teachers are not planning for progress by using attainment and assessment data to develop suitable activities that reflect different student learning needs and aptitudes. Consequently, a minority of students are off task and this sometimes leads to low-level disruptive behaviour which has an impact on the learning of others. On occasions this behaviour goes unchecked. Students voiced concerns to inspectors about inconsistencies in the way some teachers apply the behaviour code. The quality and impact of marking in student exercise books remain too variable. In some exercise books the teacher and student are in positive dialogue about improvement and the next steps in learning. In others there are few comments and no progress and development pointers. The setting, marking and relevance of homework to learning are inconsistent. In some subjects it is not set; in others it is set, but infrequently marked. Students told inspectors that they do not always understand the link between homework set and their learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Student behaviour is improving. Students are polite and have pride in their uniform. They help to keep the school tidy. They are well behaved around the school. The school atrium is a pleasant and engaging meeting place for all students to chatter during breaks or meet teachers and tutors for discussions. Students are cooperative with each other and adults. Behaviour in class has also improved. However, there remain too many lessons where a minority of students are not engaged in learning and exhibit low-level disruption which has a negative impact on the learning of their peers.

Students adopt safe practices and have opportunities to learn how to improve their safety. Attendance and punctuality have improved significantly because of targeted strategies and better links with parents. Fixed-term exclusions have fallen, although they still remain above the national average. Teachers and students reported a more robust application of behaviour rules across the school. However, students still spoke of too much low-level disruption in classes. Student told inspectors that incidences of bullying had decreased and that if bullying occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There is improved coordination and focus by senior leaders on implementing and leading the school improvement agenda. For example, more effective organisation of the special educational needs and disabilities provision has had an impact on improved student progress. More effective attendance and punctuality monitoring has enabled a 1 percentage point increase in attendance in the 2014 / 15 academic year. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is more comprehensive and better informs teachers' continuous professional development. The school's inclusion unit is now well developed and effective. A review of pupil premium

funding (additional government funding) has been undertaken and recommendations have been implemented.

Continuous professional development for staff is becoming more targeted on key aspects of improvement. Middle managers have undergone extensive training on the roles of middle leaders. Senior and middle leaders recognise that it is now essential that middle managers grasp the opportunities that greater accountability and responsibility offer and become the motivators and leaders of improvement within their areas of responsibility.

The school has developed good transitional partnerships with primary schools. This has allowed English and mathematics teachers to work with their colleagues at a primary level, so as to understand better the curriculum and students' abilities and curriculum coverage before they arrive in Year 7. This work has led to changes in the Year 7 curriculum so that it better matches student learning needs.

Some students were critical of the school's reward systems which they felt did not fully acknowledge hard work and success. The school has yet to promote successfully a culture where students can hone their oracy and communication skills and fully develop and celebrate their talents, successes and intellectual curiosity. There is little visible celebration of student achievement or visual stimulus to enhance the development of greater aspiration and ambition. Inspectors were very impressed with the potential talent and intellectual curiosity of students who they met and engaged with.

Governors have a good understanding of school performance trends and offer robust and supportive challenge to senior leaders. They receive regular reports on how pupil premium monies are allocated and how they contribute to improving the achievement and attainment of disadvantaged students. They have a very realistic view of the challenges ahead and of the need to embed and sustain any improvement achieved. An external review of governance has taken place and recommendations are being implemented.

Evaluation milestones have now been added to the school improvement plan and this is helping senior leaders to evaluate progress and the impact of actions to enable progress more regularly and analytically.

External support

Appropriate external support is provided by the local authority. In particular, the school is working closely with other good and outstanding Lancashire schools in developing aspects of leadership, teaching and learning and refining the quality assurance of provision. A partnership with a strong teaching school alliance is helping to support the school's improvement-planning and application. These partnerships are strengthening the school's capacity for further improvement.