

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

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

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Mr Tony Gavin
Headteacher
Laurence Jackson School
Church Lane
Guisborough
TS14 6RD

Dear Mr Gavin

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when Gill Salter-Smith, Moira Fitzpatrick and I inspected your school on 10 December 2009 and for the information you provided before and during our visit. I would also like to offer my thanks to the students who spoke to us during the inspection and to the members of staff, governors and local authority representatives with whom we held discussions.

There has been significant restructuring of the senior management of the school. There are now three deputy headteachers with newly defined roles and responsibilities. In addition, there have been a number of other key staff changes since the previous inspection.

As a result of the inspection in December 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards further in English and mathematics for students at all levels of ability
- embed and further develop the role of middle leaders so that they all make a positive impact on standards and progress and so that they make a stronger contribution to the drive for improvement
- ensure a consistent approach to the marking of students' work between subjects to raise achievement and share good practice.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

September 2009



Provisional examination results indicate that the proportion of students gaining five GCSE grades A* to C both with and without English and mathematics rose significantly in 2009 when compared with the previous year's results. The 2009 results were the best ever achieved by the school. The proportion of students achieving five GCSE grades A* to C shows a trend of continuous improvement. Students' achievement remains appropriate for their starting points. Progress in mathematics and English increased and indicates that the concerns expressed in the previous inspection are being dealt with effectively. Nevertheless, several aspirational targets were missed.

Within this very positive picture some pockets of underachievement are evident. For example, the school's own records indicate that the progress made by some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those entitled to free school meals has not improved enough. School leaders have carefully analysed the reasons behind these areas of underperformance and are implementing strategies to tackle them.

As at the time of the last inspection, the quality of teaching remains strong. Students speak highly of the support they receive and value the way in which teachers give freely of their time. Teachers demonstrate very secure subject knowledge and pass this on well to the students. Staff expect students to work hard and behave well. This is constantly reinforced through the recently introduced 'Olympic rings' classroom expectations document. In the best lessons teachers coach students to do as well as possible through a range of exciting and stimulating activities. Clear goals are shared at the outset and evaluated at the end. Less successful lessons often have just one task rather than a range of different activities and some have too much focus on awarding assessment levels rather than learning.

Action has been taken to improve the quality of teachers' marking. Although not yet consistent, it is getting better. While lots of marking is done, the quality of the comments vary from compliments such as 'not bad' to much more helpful analysis that indicates how the work can be improved. Rigorous assessment procedures are used to pinpoint accurately any potential underachievement earlier than in previous years. Teachers are using the information to plan tasks that are more closely matched to students' different needs and to promote appropriate levels of challenge, although this is not yet the case in every lesson.

There is no mistaking that this school has a specialism in sport. Every corridor has motivational posters celebrating sporting achievement. Students proudly tell of sporting successes and there is a great team spirit in the school. Attainment in physical education (PE) and sport continues to be high. In 2009, results for the GCSE full course, BTEC diploma in sport and BTEC diploma in dance improved and challenging targets were exceeded. Almost all students gain accreditation in sports leadership and they make good use of their leadership skills to support sporting



events for local primary school pupils. The time allocated to PE in the curriculum has been increased so that all students experience at least two hours of high-quality school sport each week. A good proportion of Key Stage 3 students experience at least three hours. Teaching continues to be strong with high expectations of learning and progress well established. The influence of the subject on other subject areas of the school is less developed. The department has shared some of its best practice, for example in lesson planning and structuring, but this has not been extensive. Leadership of the specialism is very secure.

The school has built on the good capacity to improve identified at the last inspection. The headteacher motivates staff and students to aim for excellence in all they do. His 'no pain, no gain' mantra is fitting of a sports college and shows in the way that he has not shirked difficult decisions.

The recruitment of some very able senior leaders has strengthened the leadership team substantially. Members of the new leadership team are unrelenting in their focus on improvement. This has permeated the whole staff team who are more focused on raising standards and improving the life chances of the students than previously. Leaders at all levels have a much greater involvement in making change happen. Self-evaluation continues to be accurate and rigorous and demonstrates a realistic evaluation of how well the school is doing. Middle leaders are now held to account for their department's performance and the tighter assessment procedures are used well to identify weaknesses. Governors have a better grasp of the work of the school because of the more detailed information they receive about how students are progressing.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements.

Leaders have been proactive in seeking high-quality external support from experienced high-quality consultants. This, combined with the effective support provided by the local authority and School Improvement Partner, has resulted in a greater level of external challenge and rigour. Consequently, leaders have a much better understanding of how well the school is doing against a wider benchmark.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Briggs
Lead inspector