

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

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566863

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jbennett@cfbt.com



06 July 2015

Mr Ian Smith
Executive Headteacher
Furness Academy
Park Drive
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA13 9BB

Dear Mr Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Furness Academy, Cumbria

Following my visit to your academy on 3 July 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen lines of accountability through middle leadership
- engage effectively with parents and potential parents to gather their views and make sure they are aware of the improvements that are taking place.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the headteacher who is taking up post in September 2015, two senior leaders, five middle leaders and numerous students, to discuss the actions that have been taken since the last inspection. I met with seven governors, including the Chair and Chair Designate of the Governing Body, to discuss developments in leadership and sponsorship. I visited classrooms,

spoke with students during lessons and conducted a scrutiny of work across a range of subjects. I evaluated improvement planning and looked at the school's self-evaluation and records of external support and moderation from National and Local Leaders of Education.

Context

BAE Systems has been confirmed as the new sponsor with effect from 1 September 2015. A shadow Governing Body has been established with the Chair and Chair Designate, who represents the new sponsor, working together to ensure a smooth transition. An 'Education Improvement Group' has been established, including National and Local Leaders of Education and senior leaders. The senior leadership team is being restructured following a review of roles. A new headteacher is taking up post in September, with the executive headteacher continuing in post.

Main findings

Your strategic plans for improvement are incisive and strong; they are based on accurate analysis of strengths and areas for development. They address the areas for improvement from the last inspection fully and set clear milestones to measure progress and evaluate the impact on students' outcomes. Actions taken already and the clear plans for future developments are ensuring the improvements that were evident at the last inspection continue. The focus on securing quality teaching from the start, rather than relying on intensive support to fill gaps in students' learning, is proving successful. This is effectively securing a culture shift from - in your words - 'finding and fixing to predicting and preventing' under achievement by students. Staff and students are optimistic about the future and are committed to making sure improvements are sustainable.

The older students are particularly pleased that there is the promise of lasting stability in the academy, having experienced many changes in recent years. Comments such as, 'we need structure and stability' reflect the views of many. Their observations that, 'behaviour is better now because the rules are the same in every class' and 'teachers explain new learning fully so you can see where you've gone wrong,' reflect the improvements that have been made to teaching and behaviour management. Students are excited by opportunities afforded by having BAE systems as the new sponsor and looking forward to getting a permanent headteacher.

The improvements to behaviour management are having a positive impact; exclusions are reducing and attendance is improving. There is a calm environment in the academy and students were purposefully engaged in their work in the classrooms I visited. Those I spoke to show pride in their achievements and ambition for the future. Removal from lessons is now used as a last resort rather than routinely, so the number of students sent out of lessons has reduced significantly. The inclusion rooms, which those students attend when their behaviour

has been inappropriate, are well organised and support students to learn how to manage their own behaviour. However, the work they are given in the inclusion rooms sometimes lacks challenge and interest.

The revised marking policy is helping students improve the quality of their work. Students find 'designated improvement and reflection time' useful as it enables them to make improvements to work they have completed. Where marking is most helpful, in English, art and humanities for example, teachers' comments provide students with clear guidance on how to build on their learning to achieve higher grades in subsequent pieces of work. There is still some variability in the impact of marking within and between subjects, but there is effective practice on which to build.

Your review of GCSE courses is ensuring that students moving into Year 11 next year complete a full two years of course work before sitting examinations. This is important to make sure all students are able to achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. You have also adjusted the Key Stage 3 curriculum to make sure it has sufficient breadth and depth.

Staff have benefited from professional development focusing on ensuring the most-able students are challenged and achieve to the best of their capability. Teachers are setting more ambitious targets for students, appropriate to their starting points and the progress expected of them. You are checking teaching to make sure it meets the needs of all students and moderating assessments carefully, with external support. The work I saw in students' books was well-presented and reflects teachers' higher expectations. There are times, however, when the teachers' assessments are too generous, particularly at the highest grades and with regard to students' use of vocabulary, punctuation and grammar. You are rightly ensuring that teachers have a clear understanding of how to teach and assess work at the highest levels. The most recent assessments show that students are making quicker progress, particularly at Key Stage 3. Boys and disadvantaged students are making more rapid progress so that gaps are beginning to close.

You are building capacity through new appointments and professional development to strengthen leadership at all levels. English and mathematics leaders have developed well-targeted plans to improve teaching and raise students' achievement within their subject. They have produced some very useful guidance to support the application of students' literacy and mathematical skills across other subjects. The roles of other subject leaders are being strengthened, but are not yet developed fully. Middle leaders have clearer direction and feel empowered to use their initiative. They have reviewed lesson planning, marking and schemes of learning within their subjects and are keen to extend their accountability and responsibility in leading improvement further.

Staff have participated enthusiastically in professional development opportunities, some of which have been provided by colleagues in school, and some from National

and Local Leaders of Education. Staff value the increased opportunities to share best practice, for example through the Furness Education Consortium. They are justifiably proud of their input to promote best practice in using the pupil premium to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students.

Governors are now working effectively to secure better outcomes for the academy and ensure that improvements continue as sponsorship changes. The Chair Designate and Chair are focused fully on ensuring students achieve better outcomes and the academy is securely good in as short a time as possible. Governors know the academy well and have set a clear vision and priorities for improvement.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You have drawn on external support effectively. You have made good use of expertise from Specialist Leaders of Education and National and Local Leaders, brokered through the Cumbria Alliance of System Leaders. The links with Queen Katherine Teaching School and the South Lakes Federation Teaching School Alliance are supporting professional development and the sharing of best practice effectively. Staff have benefited greatly from visits to other schools and participation in local networks.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector