

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

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 01695 566930  
Direct F 01695 729320



3 February 2010

Mr Mike Tull  
Headteacher  
Marsden Heights Community College  
Elland Road  
Brierfield  
Nelson  
Lancashire  
BB9 5RX

Dear Mr Tull

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 February 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the students for their friendly welcome and their willingness to share their views on the school.

Since the previous inspection the process of merging two schools has become further embedded. As a result of the amalgamation the number of students has fallen significantly and this has led to a reduction in staffing. The senior management team has also been reduced as a deputy headteacher has recently secured appointment as headteacher in another school. The plans for the move to the new school site and buildings are well in hand and that is to be completed later this term with the added benefits of purpose built accommodation and improved resources.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 March 2008, the school was asked to raise standards and improve boys' achievement. It was also asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning by sharing best practice and to ensure that marking gives students a clear indication of how to improve.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made

satisfactory progress in making improvements.

and



satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The attainment of students remains low, but has improved. The results in almost all indicators show a strongly rising trend over the last three years and the gap to the national averages is narrowing. The proportion of students gaining 5 or more grades A\*-C at GCSE including English and mathematics declined in 2009, but is above the national floor target. The results from early entries in English and mathematics for the current Year 11 and school assessment data indicate that the overall upward trend for this indicator will continue in 2011. The progress of students from their starting points has improved steadily over the past three years. The progress of boys and the standards that they achieve are still below those of girls, but there are signs of improvement, particularly in mathematics. Observations in lessons and the most recent data show that progress overall is at least satisfactory. Students have good relationships with their teachers and generally are keen to do well. In lessons they demonstrate that they are able to work productively whether independently or in groups. In the best lessons students show a genuine enjoyment of their work and apply themselves with enthusiasm.

Progress towards improving teaching is satisfactory. The accuracy of your evaluation of the quality of teaching was confirmed by joint observations with two of your senior colleagues. The information you provided shows that the proportion of good teaching has risen and that the amount of inadequate teaching has fallen and is very low. Systematic evaluations of teaching have effectively informed your programmes of staff development and individual support. Training for staff is delivered on a weekly basis and this is beginning to show clear benefits. In the most effective lessons work is well matched to the students' abilities, teachers have high expectations and use questioning well to assess and extend students' learning. In these lessons students make good progress. You correctly recognise that there remains work to be done before teaching will be good overall. In lessons that are satisfactory work is not sufficiently well matched to the needs of all students to allow them to make good progress. In addition teachers tend to take too dominant a role in controlling the pace of learning and do not always allow students to work independently for sufficient time to embed their understanding of concepts and to practise skills.

Assessment is satisfactory overall, but there are signs that the programme of staff development is bringing about improvement. It is more effective in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3; this reflects the greater emphasis that has been placed on raising standards at GCSE. Students report that they are given clear guidance on how to reach their target grade for GCSE through written comments on coursework and through verbal feedback on their other work. In Key Stage 3 there is regular marking, but the use of comments to set students clear targets for improvement is not consistently embedded.

You have made satisfactory progress in developing the school's capacity for further improvement. The process of self evaluation is broadly accurate and you and your senior colleagues are well aware of the strengths and areas for development in the school. You are conscious of the need to refine systems of evaluation to improve further the rigour of all aspects and have plans in hand to achieve this. You have successfully refined the role of pastoral leaders to develop further the student tracking system and to plan student intervention programmes. You have worked to continue to develop the role of middle managers in driving up attainment with some success. The impact of the developments that you have instilled is evident in the improving standards of achievement and quality of teaching. The college has been effectively supported by local authority advisers and by partner schools.

At the start of the inspection the single central record did not fully conform to government requirements for the recording of information, but actions to remedy this were taken during the period of the inspection.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Garry Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector