

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 566937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com



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Mr Simon Brennand
Headteacher
Montgomery High School - A Language College and Full Service School
All Hallows Road
Blackpool
Lancashire
FY2 0AZ

Dear Mr Brennand

Special measures monitoring inspection of Montgomery High School - A Language College and Full Service School

Following my visit with Alan Parkinson and John Leigh, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 April 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 May 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 proprietor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). I recommend strongly that any such NQTs be appointed through the academy trust to ensure support is given to these teachers from the outset and that they are provided with opportunities to observe good and better teaching.

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 Children's Services for Blackpool.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise the quality of teaching in order to accelerate the progress of all groups of students, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, the most able students and those with special educational needs and raise standards across the school, especially in mathematics and science, by:
 - making sure all teachers adapt their teaching to the needs and abilities of all groups of students and that they move students on more quickly when it is clear they are ready
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve by increasing the level of challenge, particularly for the most able students so that they make good or better progress
 - developing teachers' questioning skills so that students are given more opportunities to explore issues in greater depth
 - improving the quality of marking in all subjects so that it is regular and precise, with clear information provided to students as to the next steps in their learning and provide students with the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments and improve their work
 - disseminating more effectively existing good practice
 - further developing existing guidelines to promote students' numeracy skills and making sure all teachers follow these guidelines in the classroom.

- Improve students' punctuality to lessons by making sure all teachers challenge students when they arrive late and that students understand the consequences of not arriving on time.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - using performance management more effectively to eradicate underperformance and reward good practice
 - tightening up procedures to ensure all staff follow school policies by rigorously checking up on whether they are being implemented
 - ensuring all heads of department are effectively held to account for students' achievement in their area of responsibility
 - improving the overall leadership and management of teaching by checking that initiatives, policies and staff training are making a difference to practice in the classroom
 - improving self-evaluation so that it more accurately reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the school
 - sharpening procedures for collecting information on students' achievement so that it clearly demonstrates the progress they have made from their individual starting points and use this information more effectively to hold all teachers to account for the progress of students in their classes

- ensuring that funds available through the pupil premium secure improvement in the achievement of students eligible for such support
- undertaking an external review of governance to make sure governors challenge the school more effectively to raise standards. The external review should have a specific focus on the use of the pupil premium.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21-22 April 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher; members of the school's leadership team; 25 students; four members of the governing body, known as the Academy Council, including the Chair; three NQTs/recently qualified teachers; and two representatives of the Fylde Coast Academy Trust.

Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching and learning, visiting 17 classes. During this time inspectors observed the teaching and learning in the lessons taught, spoke with students, looked at the information held by teachers about the progress of students within the classes and examined work in students' books. Four such visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team.

Inspectors carried out informal learning walks during the school day, including at lunch time, and took the opportunity to speak with students on these occasions.

Inspectors also took into account the 49 responses received from parents on Parent View in the 365 days up to and including 21 April 2015.

Context

Montgomery High School became a sponsored academy on 1 October 2015. It is part of the Fylde Coast Academy Trust (FCAT). Because Montgomery High is known by the title 'school', such terminology is used throughout this report.

There have been a number of changes in staffing since the first monitoring inspection in September 2014. In addition, there had been significant staff absence during the autumn term of 2014 and the spring term of 2015.

The shadow governing body has now been replaced by the Academy Council.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Overall, all groups of students, including those who are disadvantaged, disabled or who have special educational needs, are making better rates of progress in their learning. These improvements are the result of improved systems to check how well students are doing. Assessments are increasingly accurate. The regular 'data cycles' for example, now increased to six in number, provide leaders with information about which students are doing well and who requires additional support. This regular checking, coupled with a range of moderation activities, including those carried out by external partners, points to better outcomes being achieved by Year 11 students in 2015 compared with those gained in the past.

However, while improving, the rates of progress made by students are variable. Data held by leaders show, for example, students in Year 8 are making better than expected progress in mathematics and science but less than expected progress in English. In Year 10, the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students making better than expected progress in English is narrowing while in mathematics it is widening. Such variability is not uncommon across the school and is confirmed by work in students' books. The reasons for this inconsistency are two-fold: previous instability in staffing, particularly in science and French, which has led to the learning of some students being disjointed; and variability in the quality of teaching.

The quality of teaching

There are signs that the quality of teaching is improving, however, it remains variable across the school and within subjects. While some teachers have high expectations and use the school's marking policy very well to challenge all groups of students, including the most able, to do their best, others do not. Some teachers ask searching questions that tease out students' understanding of what is being taught. This enables them to re-shape lessons to best meet the needs of learners. Other teachers, though, do not follow up responses to the questions they ask. This means students are not always clear in their understanding. Some marking is of high quality and identifies the next steps students should take to improve their learning very well. Such dialogue, including where students respond well to prompts, aids achievement. In some cases though, responses are not made or expected. In a few instances, work is not marked at all. Where this is the case, students do not always understand or remember what they have been taught. To promote good teaching, leaders introduced the 'Montgomery Excellent Lesson' guidance. However, this guidance does not give enough emphasis to the impact teaching should have, namely better learning.

Examples of routinely good and better teaching over time are evident in the school. Where teaching is of this quality, students make at least good progress in their learning. In English in Year 8, for example, students over time have developed a wide range of vocabulary which has enabled them to write interesting sentences, paragraphs and longer pieces of work to enhance their understanding of concepts such as 'identity'. Furthermore, sentences, such as 'As John was stepping gingerly up to the haunted house in Dead Drive, he was like a gazelle staring into the eyes of a lion', capture the attention of readers well. In this class, the teacher's constant probing questions and modelling of vocabulary is encouraging students to think boldly about the words they may use to express themselves. The teacher's attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation is also helping students to expect high standards of themselves in using these important aspects of the English language. By way of another example, a class of students in Year 7 studying French have benefited greatly from their teacher's sound knowledge of what they can do already. Because work set builds on what has been taught already and consistently seeks to

challenge all, the result is that students are able to construct increasingly complex sentences in French with confidence and accuracy. In both these examples, students, regardless of need, disadvantage or ability, thoroughly enjoy their learning, achieve well and behave well in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students have mixed views about standards of behaviour. Many of those spoken with formally and informally see improvements. They point to a calmer atmosphere around the school and value the sense of identity brought by the school uniform. Other students are less positive and dislike the way some lessons are disrupted and a few students are seen to get away with poor behaviour. Inspectors are of the opinion that behaviour, like achievement and teaching, is variable in quality: there is some that make both school and students very proud and there is some that is still not good enough.

During the course of this inspection most students behaved well – they were polite and courteous and had positive attitudes to their learning appreciating, for example, the additional revision sessions during the Easter holidays and guidance they have received about sixth form options or possible career choices. They moved around school, along the corridors and in the outside areas for example, in an orderly fashion. On a few occasions, though, learning was interrupted by low-level disruption, sometimes unchallenged by teachers, including students going in and out of lessons to go to the toilet. Furthermore, whereas inspectors saw many examples of students taking great pride in the presentation of their work, on a few occasions presentation was not good enough. While some teachers challenge students when standards of presentation fall below expectations, not all do so. This gives mixed messages to students.

Leaders are fully aware of the inconsistencies in the behaviour and attitudes of students. Where behaviour falls below expected standards, incidents are recorded. The records kept, however, are not coordinated meaning leaders do not have a clear overview of what actions have been taken to prevent incidents reoccurring or how successful these actions have been. Furthermore, leaders' records do not routinely include reference to any contact made with parents. This means it is unclear whether or not parents have been informed of incidents involving their children.

There has been a slight dip in attendance since September 2014, owing in the main to higher rates of illness. For some vulnerable students, however, there have been marked improvements – a few, for example, boasting full or nearly full attendance over the last half term up to Easter 2015. Particularly vulnerable students, those for whom external agencies are involved for example, are helped to stay in education through additional support in school or through the seeking of alternative arrangements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

With support from FCAT, leaders have carried out root and branch reviews of the school's workings. Difficult but correct decisions have been made. The performance management of leaders and teachers now focuses even more stringently on attaining good outcomes for students. Movement up the pay scale has been by exception. The curriculum has been reviewed with less successful subjects removed. Training for staff is now more focused to need and effective use is being made of the opportunities afforded by being part of the FCAT family, the sharing of training with other partner schools and academies for example. NQTs spoken with, for example, valued the opportunity to observe teaching in a local primary school and to meet with that school's special educational needs leader. Both NQTs reported that because they had seen for themselves what younger pupils can do, the experience had enabled them to raise the expectations they had for their own students. Because of previous staffing instability, though, the opportunity for NQTs to observe good or better teaching at Montgomery High has been more limited.

The Academy Council holds leaders to account increasingly well for the performance of the school. Its members' questions are challenging and rightly focused on the difference actions taken by leaders are making to the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour. As a result of this challenge and that provided by FCAT, the senior leadership team has sharpened its focus on the most important things to improve the academy. Plans in place, including the proprietor's statement of action, have been improved and are fit for purpose. These plans include targets to improve the weaknesses identified in the May 2014 inspection report and give attention to groups of students, including those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs or disabilities.

While the school is moving forward, demonstrating the growing capacity within the school, leaders agree with inspectors that the pace of improvement needs to be accelerated. Leaders' self-evaluation accurately reports there is too much inconsistency and variability in teaching quality and in the learning and behaviour of students. There are a number of reasons for this. First, and understood by leaders, is that agreed school policies are not adhered to consistently. Second, the amount of information held by leaders about students' achievement and behaviour is too complex meaning it is difficult to get a clear overview quickly.

External support

Support and challenge from FCAT has been immediate. Representatives from the Trust are taking an active role in the life of the school, including in helping to provide stability in staffing and leadership, in the appointment of a director of science for example. Trust-wide training opportunities are being utilised, for example to build up the skills of middle leaders using the experience of serving headteachers

including national leaders of education. FCAT leaders grasp fully the sense of urgency required to secure the necessary improvements.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders should accelerate further the progress the school is making by:

- making more concise the 'Montgomery Excellent Lesson' guidance so it focuses more clearly on outcomes for students
- simplifying and bringing together records of behaviour incidents so that the leadership team has a clear view of what incidents occur, what action has been taken to prevent such incidents happening again, the success of these actions and, importantly, the contact made with parents
- simplifying and bringing together records of students' achievement so that:
 - comparisons with different groups of students can be made
 - the year-on-year achievement of students as they progress through the school can be plotted
 - where targets are set, in intervention programmes for example, these make clear what students are to achieve.