

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 3115307
Direct email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com



14 March 2014

Mr Graham Payne
Headteacher
The Ashwood Centre
Ashwood Way
Basingstoke
RG23 8AA

Dear Mr Payne

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ashwood Centre

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 March 2014, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013. 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good or better and none is inadequate, to improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring teachers have higher expectations of students and plan work that matches their needs and abilities, particularly for the more able
 - making sure teachers correct spelling and punctuation and provide guidance so students are clear about the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers check students' understanding more frequently, and provide more opportunities for students to work by themselves
 - reinforcing good writing skills and encouraging higher standards of presentation in all subjects
 - ensuring that reading is taught systematically throughout the school, especially for the less able.
- Improve students' behaviour, safety and attendance by:
 - working with parents and students to reduce absences, by ensuring that everyone understands the importance of not missing school and by following up absence swiftly and rigorously
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of students' behaviour and use the school's procedures for managing behaviour
 - ensuring students transfer to a mainstream or special school at the appropriate time.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - developing comprehensive systems for analysing and evaluating information about students' progress in lessons and over time
 - making sure that systems used to check the progress of students are thorough, precise and accurate
 - providing a curriculum which fully meets students' needs and challenges them
 - increasing the amount of time spent on teaching and learning so that all students receive their full educational entitlement
 - ensuring that leaders' roles and responsibilities are clear and that they all, including teachers in charge of subjects, focus more sharply on checking the progress of groups of students
 - providing teachers with precise feedback about their performance and further training and support that enable them to improve their teaching
 - ensuring targets set for teachers' performance are directly linked to

improvements in students' progress and that pay increases reflect improvements in teaching

- ensuring the pupil premium funding is used to rapidly close the gap between the attainment of eligible students and others
- providing further training for all members of the management committee so that they can ask searching questions that challenge senior leaders to raise students' achievement.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 March 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority. Teaching was observed in seven lessons, accompanied by senior leaders. The inspector also met with a group of students, evaluated examples of students' books and folders, and spoke with a parent.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three members of staff have left the school. The planned merger of the Ashwood site and the Broadoaks site is now in progress and during the monitoring inspection there was significant building work taking place to install the new temporary classrooms. Governors of the school recently voted for the school to become a sponsored academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school rightly judges that overall achievement remains inadequate. As at the previous monitoring visit, students' progress is too slow from their low starting points. The school has established more effective systems for tracking and analysing students' progress. As a result, better use is being made of information about how well individual students are doing to plan programmes to help them catch up. All groups of students make less than expected progress, although the school has gone some way to recognising and tackling the underachievement of particular groups, such as those students eligible for additional funds and more-able students.

A legacy of poor teaching and sparse subject knowledge has hindered progress in English. However, school leaders have ensured that students now have better support with improving their reading through specific support programmes. In addition, students now have regular reading time, and more interesting and age-appropriate books have been purchased to encourage their interest. A significant amount of work has been done to reshape the English curriculum, to inspire students and prepare them adequately for external examinations. Students' books and folders show that more students are now making steady progress in most subjects. However, the school is not doing enough to ensure that students who are frequently absent catch up with work.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the last monitoring inspection, although it is still too variable. School leaders can point to particular teachers who have significantly improved their performance, but some teaching is not improving rapidly enough. When teaching is most effective, the teacher patiently gauges students' responses to topics and tasks through sensitive and close questioning and adjusts the approach accordingly, including going back over work to fill gaps. Other strengths of the most effective teaching in the school include respectful relationships between staff and students and previous work marked helpfully, with opportunities for the students to respond. When teaching is most effective, students are given appropriate levels of challenge and support with key vocabulary to help those who are not confident with expressing themselves. However, students make less progress when teachers do not explain concepts carefully, check students' understanding thoroughly or ensure that students have enough resources to help them. For example, some students who require extra support make slower progress because they have to work from poorly presented worksheets without the helpful visual prompts they need.

Teachers are increasingly adept at managing students' challenging behaviour without losing focus on learning, but some lesson planning does not take enough account of the impact that students' challenging behaviour has previously had on their learning. Some work set in lessons does not match the ability of the students. In too many cases, teachers do not take enough account of students' underlying learning difficulties and gaps in their previous skills and knowledge.

Students' books and folders are mostly well kept and orderly. During the inspection, I saw very few examples of inappropriate graffiti or messy presentation, showing that students are beginning to take more pride in their work and are taking their learning seriously. In some lessons, students looked back over previous work to support them. Marking of students' work is improving, although some books seen during the monitoring inspection had not been marked.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour on both sites is generally calm and orderly. Senior leaders conveyed concerns that students may have been unsettled as a result of the building work going on, but this was not significantly so during the inspection. Students feel safe in the school and appreciate the secure environment and the support they receive for their social and emotional needs. The students told me that they enjoy attending the school, even though some are very keen to return to their mainstream school. They praised their teachers and were happy to talk about improvements in their learning. All the students spoken to during the inspection reported that they were well supported for their emotional needs, but equally importantly, they volunteered comments about the support they had with their work. There are some particularly

heartening success stories about students' successful reintegration into mainstream schooling as a result of high-quality support and programmes of intervention.

The number of exclusions and serious incidents has dropped. Students are usually punctual to lessons and settle down quickly to learn. However, some students lack confidence and resist attempting tasks they think will be challenging. When activities are not sufficiently supported with well-chosen resources, students easily become distracted or disheartened by the perceived level of difficulty. There are still a few occasions when students disrupt each other's learning by swearing or trading insults with each other. In most cases, this is managed effectively by teachers, who carry out the behaviour policy smoothly without interrupting learning. However, the revised behaviour code and rewards system are not yet completely embedded and consistently applied in all lessons.

Attendance remains below average, but there is notable improvement for some individual students, as a result of better provision, support programmes and targeted work with parents and carers. Nevertheless, frequent absences from school are having a detrimental effect on progress for some students.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher provides strong direction and an ambitious vision for the school, supported ably by his team of senior leaders. Although there is turbulence regarding the plans to merge the two sites and the current building work, this has not distracted the senior leaders from their action plan to improve teaching and outcomes for students. School leaders have an accurate view of the school and their self-evaluation is honest and reflective. Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and have devoted significant amounts of time to observing lessons and monitoring teachers' work. Leaders have created a training plan, which links to the setting of targets for teachers' performance. School leaders can point to some teaching that has greatly improved in the school and this was confirmed during the monitoring inspection. Further work to develop consistently good teaching is rightly a key priority. However, school leaders have not made the most of developing the skills and expertise of learning support assistants.

School leaders have a clearer idea of how well groups of students are doing. They are now using shrewder methods to measure progress and track the achievement of individuals and groups of students, including those students eligible for additional funding. However, not enough work has been done to identify and evaluate exactly what makes the most impact on students' rates of progress and behaviour.

The headteacher and his team have correctly identified that there needs to be a coherent leadership plan linking extra support for reading, spelling and writing with the overall literacy policy and planning for the English curriculum and public examinations.

Students do not yet have a wide enough range of subjects to follow to prepare them well for the next steps or extend their cultural development and general knowledge. However, the introduction of some cross-curricular theme days and specialist art lessons has been successful and provided students with more dedicated time to develop their creativity, reflect on moral choices and learn about health. The programme of study for personal, social and health education is a growing strength of the school, providing students with essential opportunities to discuss challenging topics, reflect on their own behaviour and values, and develop greater resilience, all in a safe and secure environment.

Improvements to the work of the governing body have continued since the last monitoring inspection. They provide generous support, combined with considered challenge and timely refocusing of school leaders' priorities where necessary. Governors' direct involvement in the school is increasing and welcomed by school leaders, particularly during the current and planned changes to the school's site and status.

External support

The school continues to benefit from a useful range of support and guidance from the local authority. Specialist advisory support with the developments of the English curriculum has been invaluable and has provided a confidence boost for teachers. Similar levels of support have been provided for mathematics. In addition, two local authority advisers work closely with school leaders, monitoring achievement and teaching and providing challenge and guidance. A former headteacher with experience of leading a pupil referral unit is providing on-the-spot practical guidance with managing change and the site merger, enabling the headteacher to focus closely on the main areas for improvement. The school also benefits from links with leaders from successful pupil referral units and local mainstream schools.