

4 February 2011

Mr A James
Director of Services
Talbot House School, Newcastle Upon Tyne
Hexham Road
Walbottle
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE15 8HW

Dear Mr James

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Talbot House School, Newcastle upon Tyne

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 3 February 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please extend particular thanks to your head of education for his assistance and to the pupils I met and talked with.

There have been changes since the inspection two years ago. These mainly concern alterations to the arrangements for the school, approved by the Secretary of State in September 2010. The approved number on roll has risen from 50 to 60 and the age range of pupils has changed from 11 to 16 to now 7 to 18 years. At the time of the inspection the impact of these changes was yet to be seen. The numbers on roll and the age range of pupils have remained broadly the same as at the time of the previous inspection. The management structure has changed, there is a new head of education and he works alongside the head of behaviour support and the respective managers for the skill centre and residential care provision.

A separate inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 on 3 December 2010. The report for this inspection is available on the Ofsted web site.

As a result of the inspection on 26 February 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all of 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.

Attainment overall is rising and pupils' learning and progress are accelerating in line with better teaching and an improved curriculum. During the inspection, pupils were seen making better progress in lessons in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT). Through the development of more robust systems for recording the

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progress of pupils, the school is able to demonstrate that those who have been at the school longest have frequently made the best progress and demonstrate the most improved attitudes to learning. Both behaviour and the willingness of pupils to develop healthier lifestyles show improvement as a result of the new approach of school staff to discourage smoking. This has involved the successful review of policies and practice and the introduction of a successful smoking cessation initiative. Pupils and staff share a keen awareness of these initiatives. A few pupils remain inveterate smokers but they understand that smoking cannot be condoned and respect the school's regulations.

There has been improvement in the marking and annotation of pupils' work. However, this remains some variability because not all teachers share the same understanding of its value in helping pupils to improve their learning. At its best, marking carries encouraging comments about the effort pupils make and highlights how they could improve it to gain higher scores for accredited coursework. Good examples are seen in pupils' English and history books. Where marking is weaker, such as in mathematics, comments such as 'not your best work' or 'wow' give pupils little guidance as to how they can improve their work. A better example in the same subject is 'It would be easier to read if you showed the lines and boxes' (in the printout of a table). A common weakness in annotation is that comments rarely refer to targets in pupils' individual education plans. This presents a missed opportunity to demonstrate progress and empower pupils, such as when a pupil has a target to improve the presentation of their work.

Teachers are becoming increasingly confident in their use of ICT to promote learning. A good example was seen in a mathematics lesson where pupils were using computers to research information about the football World Cup in preparation for a statistical investigation of the teams competing. Use of computers to help pupils present their work remains effective. The ICT curriculum has been greatly improved and it now contributes much more to pupils' understanding of culture and the media. Pupils are now using computers to develop animation, artistic and musical skills in addition to more traditional word processing and research skills.

The school has taken good heed of the recommendations of the previous section 5 inspection. It works closely with an independent School Improvement Partner to help raise standards and improve provision. A systematic approach to the review of policies and procedures has been introduced with the full involvement of governors and trustees. Self-evaluation is suitably critical, while at the same time it identifies the school's strengths. The changes in approved arrangements for the school have been carefully considered by leaders, managers, governors and trustees following extensive consultation with partner organisations, which include the local authorities that refer pupils. The development of provision for vocational studies is proving increasingly successful, with increasing numbers of other schools and pupil referral units buying into part-time or sessional placements for their pupils as they recognise its value. The social care report from the previous section 5 inspection highlighted two minor omissions in the school's procedures, both of which were addressed promptly.

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

Yours sincerely

Mr Alastair Younger
Additional inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 26 February 2009

- Improve the marking of students' work to make them more aware of how they can improve their learning.
- Ensure that ICT is extended to support learning in all subjects.
- Ensure that policies and procedures for students' guidance, including non-smoking, are kept up to date and implemented more rigorously.

The inspection report also highlighted the need for the school to ensure that it met certain National Minimum Standards as detailed in the boarding section of the report.