

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T** 0845 123 6001
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 0845 123 6002
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** rebecca.jackson@tribalgroup.com

24 March 2011

Mr M Bland
The Headteacher
Abbotsfield School
Clifton Gardens
Hillingdon
Uxbridge
UB10 0EX

Dear Mr Bland

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Abbotsfield School

Following my visit with Olson Davis, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed at this stage. They may be appointed to all subjects and year groups.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 Hillingdon.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010

- Raise standards in all subjects across all key stages, but especially in English, by July 2011, through:
 - ensuring all staff use realistic but challenging targets to secure improvements
 - developing students' literacy skills in all subjects across the curriculum
 - marking students' work systematically and rigorously to help them improve it and make faster progress in their learning
 - using a range of activities in lessons to challenge, motivate and engage all students and meet their needs more effectively.
 - improve the quality and the impact of the monitoring and evaluation approaches and improvement planning of all leaders, managers and the governing body.

Special measures: monitoring of Abbotsfield School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of students, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, teachers, middle and senior managers.

Context

Following the inspection, the governing body was disbanded and an interim executive board (IEB) was constituted by the local authority in January 2011. The school has a large historical deficit and is balancing in-year income/expenditure. Although the school has a growing roll of approximately 30 to 40 year on year, it faces considerable challenges within the learning environment that include the poor cleanliness and state of the school buildings. There are no planned additional resources to address this.

The local authority has withdrawn delegation of funding to the school and the principal budget holder is the Chair of the IEB. The chair is the Senior Head of School Improvement within the local authority and is in the school for two days a week offering local authority support to the school. The IEB comprises an executive head of a hard governance secondary federation and an executive head of a hard governance primary federation, a City Challenge Adviser, a governor of the previous governing body and two 'additional skills' external governors.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Key Stage 4 GCSE results indicated a marked dip in the numbers of students attaining five A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics), from 53% (2009) to 41% in 2010. Attainment in English, with only 43% of students achieving successful outcomes, was much lower than national averages and lower than in mathematics, where 66% of students were successful. The school has been supported by the local authority's English subject adviser who produced a comprehensive report on the weaknesses, relating to examination performance and coursework. This identified significant inaccuracies in teacher marking and moderation of English course work that resulted in GCSE grades being downgraded by the examination board.

The school's advanced skills teacher in media and English has subsequently been working with teachers on implementing more effective teaching approaches and assessment techniques.

The school's data indicates that in 2011 52% of students are predicted to attain five A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics). These predictions are based on current levels of progress and the number of successful early entries for the GCSE mathematics and English examinations. Nearly one quarter of the 43 students entered have already successfully attained GCSEs in both subjects, with just over half of the students being successful in both English and mathematics.

Although there is a legacy of underachievement, predictions this year indicate slightly higher levels of progress than last year. CATS tests conducted for Year 7 entrants during the first term enable the school to set more realistic targets for individual students. Target setting has greatly improved and the majority of students, in particular those questioned in Years 10 and 11, had good knowledge of their targets and what they needed to do to attain them. Nevertheless, students reported and inspectors observed that, in some cases, levels of progress achieved by students meant that when they exceeded their targets teachers were insufficiently responsive and aspirational in setting new targets.

In just under one third of the lessons observed by inspectors, across a range of subjects, students made good learning and progress. In these lessons, teachers checked students' learning effectively, enabling periods of reflection and consolidation before moving on to the next activity or task. In addition, they deployed clear targeted questioning that was open ended and evaluative. In addition, students had good opportunities for engaging in peer and group work and discussion. In less well taught lessons students made only satisfactory or inadequate progress because activities and tasks were not in line with students' capabilities and did not sufficiently challenge the more able students. Less able students often showed little understanding of the task and some had not acquired the necessary skills to complete the task. Moreover, there was little opportunity for students to evaluate their own learning against the learning objectives and to improve on their literacy skills.

Through work scrutiny and discussion with students in lessons, a number of older students with well-below reading ages displayed poor literacy skills. A promising start has been made through the school's new literacy strategy as this highlights the importance for teachers in developing literacy skills across all subjects. One of the initiatives is the use of the form tutor session to encourage students to read books and newspapers and to discuss current affairs. This contributes towards greater awareness of the written word and generating students' interest in local and global events, but these activities are largely unstructured and unrelated to students' prior attainment and reading ages. Therefore, the session activities do not appear to lead to greater consolidation of writing and oral skills within subjects. In most lessons, teachers have a good focus on sharing key words with students and marking in books highlights the importance of correct grammar and spelling. However, there is too much inconsistency in further strategies and actions that would have a significant impact on improving their literacy skills.

The inclusion department has put in place a paired reading programme for students with low reading scores, but the school has not yet fully monitored its effectiveness. A number of students were observed by inspectors in lessons working on activities and tasks, not structured effectively, in line with their additional language and/or literacy needs. The development of literacy skills is an area that, the school has rightly recognised, needs further review and monitoring for impact across the curriculum.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensuring all staff use realistic and challenging targets to secure improvements – satisfactory
- developing students' literacy skills in all subjects across the curriculum – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour around the school is broadly satisfactory and most students display courtesy towards staff and other adults. In lessons the quality of students' behaviour is highly dependent on the quality of teaching and the levels of progress made by students. This means that where students are progressing in their learning they behave well and respectfully towards the teacher and towards one another. An area of concern not in evidence at the last inspection, but identified during this monitoring visit, relates to the high numbers of fixed-term exclusions. The school has not implemented rigorous monitoring that evaluates the impact of the school's behaviour strategy in the classroom, the use of the tuition centre and the 'call out' system. Therefore, the issue of high exclusions has not been effectively addressed. In addition, inspectors observed some tardiness by students at the start of lessons, despite a five-minute break between lessons that enables students to arrive punctually at their next lesson. The school has rightly identified the need to reduce persistent absence and to raise attendance.

The effectiveness of provision

Although there is now greater consistency in the way planning for lessons is structured, too often, in practice, teaching does not always meet the needs of all students in the class, in particular higher attaining students and those with poor literacy skills. In addition, support staff are not involved closely enough in the planning of in-class support and do not always effectively help individuals and groups of students develop independent learning strategies. This is largely because in the satisfactory lessons, and the smaller number of inadequate lessons, teachers are not using the clear and accurate data they now have on students' prior attainment in planning appropriate learning activities. Therefore, the pace of teaching and staging of activities are often pitched inappropriately. In a number of these lessons, teachers neither listen nor question students sufficiently, and therefore are not able to reshape tasks and expectations and improve students' learning and progress. Too little use is made of assessment activities that can inform teachers of the progress that individual students are making.

In some lessons, too much teacher talk and teacher and student question and answer activities limit opportunities for students to engage in paired and group work. In science, students are not always encouraged to develop investigative skills, and in some mathematics lessons too little use is made of everyday contexts in enabling students to understand how to transfer their skills and knowledge to real-life situations. In modern foreign languages, most activities and tasks do not engage students in their learning and students have little opportunity to use the target language with confidence and to consolidate what they have learnt. This results in the majority of students having poor oral and written skills, lacking enjoyment in learning and displaying highly disruptive behaviours.

In good lessons, for instance, in English and history, teachers create high levels of engagement and motivation through relevant activities and students are given opportunities to improve their literacy skills, reflect on their learning and develop analytical skills. Students report that the quality of feedback they receive on their written work has improved and teachers offer clear explanations, where students' answers to questions or written work demonstrate the need for further guidance. However, there is little evidence that students are given opportunities to act on the diagnostic assessments and to learn from their teachers' comments. Academic guidance is beginning to gain a consistent foundation in the importance of accurate assessment of students' learning. Nevertheless, there is still too much inconsistency and lack of rigour across all subjects.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- using a range of activities in lessons to challenge, motivate and engage all students and meet their needs more effectively – satisfactory
- marking students' work systematically and rigorously to help them improve it and make faster progress in their learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Staff morale is good and there is a shared sense of purpose and commitment evident in all managers and teachers, to address the areas of improvement from the last inspection. Since then, the school has focused its energies on developing greater capacity in its senior and middle leaders so that they are able to undertake more rigorous lesson observations. A satisfactory start has been made in this respect. There is an effective understanding by observers of the criteria used to judge teaching, attainment and learning but, as yet, teachers lack this level of awareness. The school has addressed weaknesses in its self-evaluation process and the present self-evaluation gives a fair and mostly accurate description of the school's position, with the exception of the school's internal lesson observations. These reveal a more generous profile with a higher proportion of good teaching than that observed by inspectors. The school's action plan is clear and identifies targets and dates for completion, but does not contain progress updates against milestones so the leaders and managers are unable to evaluate fully the impact of their actions.

The school has rightly identified English, science, information and communication technology, history, drama and graphics as the subjects where students underachieve and is addressing this through recruitment of new teachers, relevant staff development and deployment of local authority subject advisers in working with teachers. However, at the time of the monitoring visit, the school had not recognised the full extent of underachievement, poor levels of learning and progress and inadequate student behaviour in modern foreign languages. Leaders and managers had underestimated the impact of this on students and on other curriculum areas. Strategies to address these weaknesses have not been effective as yet.

Staff and students report that students' performance is more rigorously monitored and staff have access to reliable and accurate data on their students. Subsequently, teachers can identify those who underachieve and allocate additional subject support outside of lessons. Sharing of good teaching practice within and across curriculum areas is in place and much appreciated by teachers and managers, but is not yet widespread. The professional development of teachers and managers is supported by external education improvement partnerships and consultancies, through City Challenge and staff report on the helpfulness of this input.

Specialist Status

Students' attainment in mathematics is above national averages and is within national averages for information and communication technology (ICT). The school has recently introduced new accreditation for ICT that it aims will be more compatible with the ethos of a Specialist Mathematics, Computing and Applied Learning School. Developing students' ICT skills across the curriculum is being addressed through the use of more available laptop computers. The school is aware of weaknesses in teaching within the small ICT department and is addressing these. However, at the time of the monitoring visit the school had not evaluated the impact of its specialist status on students' achievement and standards and further, within local communities.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality and the impact of the monitoring and evaluation approaches and improvement planning of all leaders, managers and the governing body – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority statement of action was judged by HMI in the Schools Causing Concern Team in Quality Assurance to need:

- quantifiable staged targets in relation to attainment and the quality of teaching and learning
- mechanisms for ensuring that parents are aware of the issues, and with what success the school and local authority are tackling these.

At the time of the monitoring visit these amendments had been included, but the targets in relation to the quality of teaching and learning are not realistic and do not reflect the reality of the weaknesses observed by inspectors in lessons. The statement of action has not been updated to indicate completed actions against milestones and no evaluation was available of the impact of these actions.

The school has evaluated local authority support with teachers and managers' professional development and assistance with establishing an internal lesson observation cycle as helpful. Nevertheless, following the imminent termination of local authority subject adviser posts, the local authority has not undertaken a risk analysis with the school to determine the levels of school improvement support available post March 2011. Moreover, the action plans are not updated to reflect these changes.

Priorities for further improvement

- To ensure that the local authority representative identifies a school improvement strategy post March 2011 that takes into account the diminished levels of support available to the school and that all action plans are updated to reflect these changes; thereafter careful monitoring to better evaluate the impact of actions.
- To ensure more rigorous monitoring by leaders, managers and teachers of the impact of all initiatives relating to students' literacy skills.
- To ensure that teachers enable students to implement guidance on their written work, resulting from diagnostic assessments and marking.
- To ensure that teachers' use of assessment activities in lessons is more consistent and informative of individual students' progress, so that teachers are able to shape activities and tasks in line with students' abilities and needs.
- To ensure that weaknesses in teaching are addressed with urgency in modern foreign languages.