

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

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

Dear Mr Bland

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Abbotsfield School

Following my visit with Andrew Bird, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 July 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 second 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 is 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 July 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 and two members of the Interim Executive Board, teachers and middle and senior managers.

Context

The Interim Executive Board (IEB), constituted by the local authority in January 2011, is working towards the creation of a shadow governing body. The school has, in the current year, balanced its income and expenditure, and is projected to have a surplus. As yet there are no additional resources available to address the significant maintenance and refurbishment works needed to remedy the poor state of the school buildings. The principal budget holder is the Chair of the IEB who is the Senior Head of School Improvement within the local authority. He continues to provide support to the school with the monitoring of teaching.

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

Key Stage 4 GCSE results are predicted this year to rise to 55% of students attaining 5 A* – C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, from 41% in 2010. The school has acted effectively on the weaknesses identified in English, relating to examination performance and coursework, and significantly strengthened students' performance in this subject. In 2011, 63% of students are predicted to achieve successful outcomes, in line with national averages. Improved results are predicted in both science and mathematics.

Target setting has greatly improved and the majority of students are more confident of knowing their targets and in particular, knowing what they need to do to attain them. Nevertheless, in some subjects, students reported that when they exceeded their targets, teachers were insufficiently aspirational in setting more challenging learning objectives in lessons.

Where inspectors observed students making good learning and progress, such as in geography, English and science lessons, teachers checked students' learning effectively through targeted and levelled questioning and peer-assessment. In less-well-taught lessons students made only satisfactory or inadequate progress because questioning techniques and activities were not in line with students' capabilities and did not sufficiently challenge students' abilities and skills.

The school has made good progress in developing students' literacy skills through a range of initiatives. These include a stimulating display of literacy strategies and students' work in corridors and sharing key words with students in lessons. In

addition, the school has successfully piloted an interactive computer program, resulting in a significant increase in the reading ages of a small group of students. All teachers were observed by inspectors to have some focus on literacy skills in their lessons and students reported on the helpfulness of this. However, a few students were observed by inspectors working on tasks, not structured effectively, in line with their English language levels.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour around the school is improving and the majority of students display courtesy towards staff and other adults. In lessons, the quality of students' behaviour continues to be 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. Although high numbers of fixed-term exclusions at whole school level have now decreased, numbers of exclusions in Years 8 and 9 are still relatively high. The school has been rigorous in its recording of poor behaviour incidents. During the period May to July, this number increased, but mostly in relation to disruptive behaviour in lessons. The strategy of swapping students to other lessons when they misbehave has not been effective. The school recognises this and is reviewing its actions to identify alternatives. At this inspection visit, greater levels of student punctuality were observed. Students' attendance and levels of persistent absence are broadly in line with national averages.

The effectiveness of provision

The school's clear momentum on improving teaching and therefore, accelerating students' learning and progress in lessons, is resulting in a slightly higher proportion of lessons with good teaching, as observed by inspectors. Real strengths exist across subjects, for instance, in English and geography. In these lessons, teachers create high levels of engagement and motivation through enjoyable and relevant activities and students are given opportunities to improve their literacy skills, reflect on their learning and develop evaluative skills. In addition, support staff effectively help individuals develop independent learning strategies. Despite the school's emphasis on the more flexible deployment of teaching assistants with groups of students, this practice was not observed by inspectors.

Although teachers are now planning lessons in a much more systematic and structured way, too often, in practice, teaching does not always meet the needs of all students in the class, in particular higher attaining students. In some cases, less-able students show little understanding of the task, while some do not acquire the necessary skills or knowledge to complete them. In these instances, teachers do not take the opportunity to reshape tasks and expectations and improve students' learning and progress.

There is some excellent assessment practice in some areas of the curriculum but in too many lessons, assessment activities are not used systematically to help students make faster progress in their learning. In some lessons, too much teacher and student question and answer activity continues to limit opportunities for students to become active learners. In science, students are not always encouraged to develop predictive skills. In Spanish lessons, where activities and tasks do not engage students in their learning, they cannot consolidate what they have learnt. In these instances, the majority of students display poor oral and written skills and some engage highly disruptive behaviours.

Academic guidance is increasingly gaining a consistent foundation in helping students understand their strengths and the gaps in their learning. While in many cases the quality of feedback and marking students receive on their written work has improved, there is still a high level of inconsistency across subjects and within subjects.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Staff morale continues to be good and there is a greater sense of purpose and commitment evident in all managers and teachers to address the areas of improvement from the last inspection. The school has made good progress in assuring the quality of teaching through developing the capacity of senior and middle managers. Most can now effectively undertake lesson observations and correctly identify the strengths and areas of development in lessons they observe. However, there is still some uneven understanding of what constitutes satisfactory progress by groups of students. Moreover, lesson observations do not demonstrate sufficient evidence of assessing what students have learnt through, for instance, work sampling and interviews with them. Subsequently, the school's internal observations reveal a slightly more generous profile in some instances, with a higher proportion of good teaching than that observed by inspectors.

While the school has successfully addressed weaknesses in the English department and the science curriculum, its strategies have been less effective in modern foreign languages. However, the school recognises that it has not been fully effective in its improvement strategies in this respect, and is reviewing its actions. Staff are very aware of their students' performance and can refer to reliable and accurate data. While they can now identify those who underachieve, this practice is not widespread and inspectors identified a few lessons where students were not receiving adequate levels of subject support. Sharing of good teaching practice through hosted learning conversations and sharing of teaching resources between teachers is much valued by teachers and managers. In addition, staff have benefitted from professional development opportunities supported through external education improvement partnerships.

The school has made sound progress in its monitoring and evaluation of the main school priorities of teaching, assessment and literacy. Three senior managers undertake effectively these processes for their individual areas; however they do not undertake a collaborative evaluation of the strengths and gaps in provision. This results in a fragmented approach to the setting of whole school strategies. The school recognises that it needs to prioritise developing the self-evaluation skills of middle managers.

The IEB is providing limited support and challenge to the school. Members have rightly identified the constraints in finance as a barrier to recruitment of staff and, most importantly, in addressing the poor learning environment, and are supporting the school in this. However, members do not have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas of development against all of the school's priorities, most critically in relation to teaching, assessment and literacy. This is largely because the IEB and the school have not developed good communication channels and members do not engage sufficiently with staff at all levels. Therefore, the IEB's scrutiny of the school's progress against the areas of improvement lacks rigour. Nevertheless, the school's own monitoring processes provide an honest and clear account of the school's progress to date, in most areas of its work.

Specialist status

Developing students' computing skills across the curriculum is being addressed through the use of laptop computers. However, teachers miss valuable opportunities in lessons for students to contribute to their learning through use of SMART board equipment and software. Staffing weaknesses in teaching within the information and communication technology department are not yet fully resolved.

External support

The local authority action plan now reflects targets that are more realistic in relation to the quality of teaching and learning but monitoring does not take into account the high levels of inconsistency in assessment and marking, and therefore the plan does not reflect the weaknesses observed by inspectors on this visit. The statement of action does not indicate the impact of completed actions against the milestones, although a sound evaluation has been carried out of the impact of external support received by the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- To ensure that the IEB creates more effective protocols and communication channels with school staff at all levels and to ensure greater challenge and support in the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of actions.
- To ensure more coordinated monitoring by senior and middle leaders of the impact of all initiatives relating to teaching, assessment and students' literacy skills.

- To ensure greater consistency by teachers in marking and implementing guidance on students' written work.
- To ensure that teachers use of assessment in lessons shapes activities and tasks in line with students' abilities and needs.
- To ensure that weaknesses in teaching are addressed with greater urgency in modern foreign languages.