

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 3115319
Direct F 0117 3150430
Direct email: matthew.parker@tribalgroup.com

18 November 2011

Ms Judy Rider
Principal
Brompton Academy
Marlborough Road
Gillingham
ME7 5HT

Dear Ms Rider

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Brompton Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Gale HMI to your academy on 16–17 November 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 a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, groups of pupils and governors, including representatives of the sponsors. The inspectors observed 20 part-lessons.

Context

Brompton Academy, which specialises in the arts and science, opened in September 2010. It is sponsored by the University of Kent. The academy accepts students of all abilities in an area where there is selective education. There are 993 students on roll, including 64 post-16 students. The academy, like the predecessor school, is oversubscribed for entry to Year 7. The academy currently occupies the site of the predecessor school but is set to move to brand new buildings on an adjacent site from September 2013. The very large majority of students are of White British heritage with 15% of students of minority ethnic heritage. These students come from a range of backgrounds with no group predominant. The proportion of students

who speak English as an additional language is lower than average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national average. The proportion of students joining the school other than at the usual time of admission is higher than that seen nationally. There are 33 students on roll from service families.

Over half of the academy's students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and 10% have a statement of special educational need. The range of needs includes specific learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, severe learning difficulties and behavioural, social and emotional needs. The academy provides additional support and education for students with a statement of special educational need through specialist resource provision known as the communications centre.

The current principal and one of the vice-principals transferred from equivalent posts at the predecessor school. The senior leadership team also includes staff who transferred from the predecessor school, including some staff who have been promoted to more senior roles. Most academy staff transferred from the predecessor school although there have been a small number of new appointments to the teaching staff. The academy did not have a subject leader for English in its first year but this post has now been filled.

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

The academy has maintained the upward trajectory of improvements in students' attainment seen in the predecessor school. Students' attainment in securing five GCSE grades, or their equivalent through other qualifications, rose to 84% in the academy's first year. Provision for vocational qualifications has continued to have a significant and positive impact on students' attainment, and pass rates across the wide range of BTEC qualifications offered are high. The proportion of students attaining merits and distinctions in these qualifications is also rising in most subjects, but remains too low in BTEC art and BTEC sport.

Rising attainment in mathematics seen in the predecessor school has also been maintained and in 2011, 52% of students secured an A* to C grade in GCSE mathematics. All groups of students achieve well in mathematics, including students with different special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some students make outstanding progress. Attainment in English dipped in the academy's first year and not enough students met their challenging targets. This explains why the proportion of students' attaining five good grades at GCSE, including in mathematics and in English, also dipped to 34%. Attainment and achievement across the full range of GCSE courses remain too inconsistent, however, and there are marked contrasts in the standards students achieve between GCSE subjects.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well overall with the result that many attain in line with their peers. Like other students, their progress is stronger in mathematics than in English and science. Students who receive specialist support in the communications centre make excellent progress in developing their speech, language and communication skills. Very well-targeted provision has a clear impact in raising the confidence and self-esteem of these and other students with complex needs. The growing number of students in the school who speak English as an additional language make good progress and overall, their attainment is higher than that of other students.

Students enjoy their lessons and respond well to challenging and well-paced activities. For example, in a science lesson at Key Stage 4, students made good progress in developing their understanding of the Haber cycle because activities were varied, fast paced, thought provoking and challenging. By the end of the lesson, all groups of students had a good understanding of the importance of this process in maintaining the world's food supply. However, in some lessons students make only satisfactory progress because tasks are not sufficiently varied or challenging. On occasions, students' progress is hindered because the pace of learning is too slow. In these lessons, students are required to work at the same speed, regardless of their differing levels of attainment. Where this happens, more-able students do not make sufficiently rapid gains in their learning.

Success rates in the small number of vocational courses in the sixth form are good overall.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' attendance has risen significantly and is now above the national average. The proportion of students who are persistent absentees has dropped significantly to be more closely aligned to the national average.

In most lessons seen, students' behaviour was good. On occasions, when the pace of learning was too slow or activities were not sufficiently well matched to students' needs and interests, a few students lost focus and were too easily distracted. Students consistently reported that behaviour has improved since the academy opened. They attribute this to better teaching, a clearly understood code of conduct and the academy's very robust and rapid response to any incidents of poor behaviour. The number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions has halved since the academy opened, as has the proportion of students subject to more than one fixed-term exclusion.

Students, including those whose circumstances make them potentially more vulnerable, consistently reported that they feel very safe. They report that the closer monitoring and support they receive through the mini-school system ensures that any incidents of bullying are effectively and very rapidly dealt with.

The effectiveness of provision

Of the 20 part-lessons seen during the inspection, in 10, students made good or better progress. When teaching is most effective, well-crafted activities empower students to learn independently. In a good cross-curricular lesson seen, through the mini-learning-modules curriculum, students made good progress as they worked together to decipher what they could learn from dissecting owl pellets. The activity built well on previous learning and enabled students to apply their growing understanding of anatomy as they evaluated their findings. This linked well to their wider enquiry into the work of palaeontologists. In less effective lessons, the pace of learning is restricted by activities which are overly dominated by the teacher. In these lessons, all students have to work at the same pace and this hinders the progress of higher attainers. On some occasions, tasks are not sufficiently engaging to ensure that all learners are challenged and fully involved at all stages of the lesson. Not all teachers are equally effective in making the most of the extended lesson times which are a feature of the academy's curriculum. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well.

The curriculum is imaginative and innovative and is structured to allow students to secure qualifications, particularly vocational qualifications, from Year 9. Other students benefit from opportunities to take BTEC qualifications and GCSEs in Years 9 and 10. This has a significant impact in raising their attainment and has increased the range of courses that students can take. The promotion of literacy runs through the curriculum and is a consistent feature of lessons. For example, in mathematics, students record new words and their meanings in a systematic way. All lessons begin with a starter activity designed to promote literacy. The curriculum is enhanced by a superb range of extra-curricular activities, fully funded by the academy. These include horse riding, sailing and rock climbing. A key feature of this programme is the way in which it is highly personalised, for example, with highly tailored provision for looked-after children and young carers whose circumstances might otherwise make it difficult to participate.

The academy has built successfully on the outstanding provision for care, guidance and support provided by the predecessor school. The mini-school structure is highly valued by students because it means they are very well known by a small group of dedicated staff. Students were effusive in their praise for the support they receive, through, for example their personal tutors, student-mentors and mentors from the University of Kent. Academy staff are acutely aware of the needs of different groups of students, with special provision arranged for those facing challenging personal circumstances, including the children of service personnel, looked-after children and refugees.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal and her senior staff are highly respected by the school community. Morale is high and teachers and other staff share the principal's determination to do everything possible to improve the life chances of students at the academy. Strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning are increasingly having an impact and the proportion of good lessons has risen. Students' learning benefits very clearly from the improved skills of teachers in meeting the needs of students with low literacy skills as a result of good training. Teachers are also developing their expertise by sharing best practice through the teaching and learning group. Systems of accountability have been strengthened through the mini-school system together with robust performance management procedures. Nevertheless, senior leaders know, through their very accurate appraisals of the quality of teaching, that too many lessons continue to secure only satisfactory rates of progress. There remains too much inconsistency in the proportion of good lessons seen between different curriculum areas. Self-evaluation is extremely accurate and based on good quality data and very sharp awareness of the academy's context and the diverse groups of students on roll. Staff are highly responsive to any minor changes in student intake and ensure that provision is quickly adapted to reflect students' cultural and personal needs. Planning for all aspects of the academy's work is extremely detailed and the extensive improvement plan is being adapted to ensure that leaders and managers, including governors, can more easily evaluate how effectively plans are implemented. Target setting is extremely ambitious, but targets for subjects which have performed less well in the past are not always realistic.

The academy's specialisms in the arts and science have a growing profile in the academy through, for example initiatives such as the Da Vinci Day which involved 400 students visiting the University of Kent. The specialist subjects are also being used to strengthen transition arrangements with feeder primary schools through a range of cross-phase projects.

External support

The academy has made judicious use of external support, including from the academy's sponsor. Particularly good use has been made of students from the University of Kent to work with students from the academy as mentors and as ambassadors for higher education. Strategies such as these are having a clear impact in raising students' aspirations and self-esteem. Staff from the university have also provided support to help strengthen teaching and in the development of the curriculum for younger students. Good links with the sponsor have also broadened curriculum provision for post-16 students through, for example, the shared teaching of the advanced supplementary psychology course.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Secure greater consistency in achievement and attainment across the full range of GCSE subjects.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers are equally skilled in making the best use of the extended lesson times, through well-paced, varied activities which secure high levels of engagement and good progress in all stages of the lesson
 - ensuring that lessons consistently challenge all groups of learners, particularly higher attaining students.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector