

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 0845 123 6001
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Direct email:
rebecca.jackson@tribalgroup.com

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Mr Gordon Cunningham
Headteacher
Easthampstead Park Community School
Ringmead
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 8FS

Dear Mr Cunningham

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Easthampstead Park Community School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 January 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also convey my thanks to students, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the local authority for taking time to meet and work with me.

Since the last inspection, the school has experienced considerable staff turnover, much of which was due to retirement or promotion. Most posts have been filled, including the key role of special educational needs coordinator, although this work is being overseen by the deputy headteacher until the new postholder arrives. Recruitment is under way for two English teachers. About one fifth of the teaching staff now comprises newly qualified teachers. Financial constraints have led to a reduction in the senior leadership team, by three posts.

As a result of the inspection on 8 and 9 June 2011, 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 the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

GCSEs results for 2011 demonstrate strong improvement in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher, which increased by 19 points to 78%, just above the national average. When English and mathematics are included, however, the figure is 48%, significantly below average and broadly similar

to 2010. There is a trend of improvement in the progress of students entering the school at Level 3, in both English and mathematics. However, in English there was a dip in the progress of middle-ability students, and in mathematics the progress of the least able was insufficient. High-attaining students exceeded expectations and have consistently done so. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieved broadly in line with the national average, both overall and in English and mathematics. Achievement in the sixth form shows some variation. Students continue to reach national standards in A-level passes but lower-than-average proportions achieve the highest grades. Progress in AS- and A-level courses was less secure than in previous years, but stronger in applied courses.

The last inspection report noted that low-level disruption was inhibiting learning in some lessons, especially in lower sets. This problem persists; too many students reported to the inspector that their lessons suffer from interruptions by a small number of poorly behaved individuals. This is due in part to teacher inexperience, absence or weaknesses in classroom management.

Whole-school tracking is detailed; its use to monitor the achievement of all students, including the least able, is increasingly effective. The use of this information by teachers in lessons is improving. There is a clearer understanding across the school of collective accountability for all students' progress. Teachers make better use of tracking sheets to monitor achievement in their own groups, identify slippage and provide intervention.

A revised lesson planning format makes explicit how different learning needs will be addressed and its implementation is becoming more consistent across the school. Teachers have a better understanding of how to employ strategies that engage and challenge everyone and which are a feature of the best lessons. In history, one boy explained the crown on his desk by saying, 'Oh, I was Henry VIII at the start of the lesson'. Teachers are willing to embrace more creative approaches; however, they require skilled planning and management. Senior leaders recognise that less experienced or weaker practitioners need training and support to maximise their impact.

Strategies to achieve a better balance of student and teacher talk are having a positive impact. The use of bingo balls or names on lolly sticks to vary the choice of who will answer the teacher's question makes learning more fun. Its true purpose is well understood by students as ensuring fairness and drawing out potentially reluctant speakers. In some lessons, however, questioning is still too open or random and small numbers of highly vocal students dominate.

The coordination of teaching assistants, including those specially trained to support English and mathematics, is better managed, with middle leaders now more influential in their deployment. In a focused literacy lesson, teaching assistants circulated and ensured that students who struggle with basic sentence construction could keep up with the learning. By the end, everyone could put together a complex sentence. One student's new learning was visible when she anticipated the direction

of the lesson, asking whether subordinate clauses could be used at the start of a sentence.

A coaching programme is now in place to match stronger teachers to weaker or less experienced colleagues. Records of lesson observations show that this is strengthening practice; one teacher described how coaching had improved his ability to plan for all students to make progress in every single lesson. 'Literacy Champions' have been identified to lead initiatives designed to improve reading, writing and communication in all subjects and to widen the impact of existing good practice, although this is in its early stages.

The quality of marking and assessment is improving. Students like the school policy of identifying what went well (WWW) in their work and what would improve it (EBI – 'even better if'). 'Podium' stamps use the sports metaphor to reward good work and set further targets. Students who met with the inspector could all point to examples of informative assessment which had helped them improve. Most knew their English and mathematics targets and could explain what to do to reach them. However, inspection evidence also confirmed their views that the marking and assessment policy is inconsistently applied within and across subjects.

The local authority statement of action and accompanying plan was approved as fit for purpose. It is being closely and effectively monitored by the Management Intervention Board. Additional leadership capacity has been provided by the local authority through the work of a teaching and learning adviser, who supports senior teachers in their systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching. The school is also using the services of an external consultant to moderate and sharpen judgements about teaching and learning. During the inspection, lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders, whose evaluations were rigorous and accurate. As a result of close monitoring and focused training, inadequate teaching is reducing but has not been wholly eradicated.

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

Christine Raeside

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2011

- Raise the achievement of lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities by:
 - rapidly developing teachers' skills in helping lower-attaining students to make good progress in lessons, with less lesson time dominated by the teacher talking and ensuring questioning involves the whole class
 - fully embedding recent improvements to the monitoring and evaluation of the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - ensuring that additional adults are deployed more effectively to have a greater impact on the achievement of lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
 - ensuring that lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress in English and mathematics.

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons and eradicate the small proportion of inadequate teaching by:
 - increasing the impact of strategies to share the excellent practice seen in specialist subjects and performing arts more widely across the school
 - improving teachers' use of assessment so that lessons are fully matched to students' individual needs and prior attainment
 - increasing the consistency of higher-quality marking and assessment so that students and their teachers have a clearer understanding of what students need to do to raise their attainment in all curriculum areas
 - ensuring that teaching is consistently stimulating and challenging and that lessons have a greater impact in developing students' skills in independent learning.