

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 311 5373
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Direct email: Jo-anne.Harwood
@tribalgroup.com

7 February 2013

Mr Adam Williams
Principal
Bath Community Academy
Rush Hill
Bath
BA2 2QL

Dear Mr Williams

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Bath Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 5 and 6 February 2013, 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 monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders and staff, groups of students, the Chair of the Academy Council and the Executive Principal of the sponsor, Cabot Learning Federation. Inspectors observed 21 lessons, of which 15 were carried out jointly with the academy's leaders.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

- The academy is a mixed school, whereas the predecessor school was boys only. Girls make up approximately a quarter of Year 7 and there are a small number of girls in other year groups.

- The academy is much smaller than the average school, with 287 on roll, including 35 in the sixth form. The number is rising quickly and there are four times as many students in Year 7 as in Year 8. The academy is admitting a small number of new students every week into all year groups except Year 11.
- The sixth form is very small, and currently only accommodating students in Year 12. From September 2013, sixth form provision will be through Cabot Learning Federation post-16 provision.
- The academy has a new senior leadership team. The Principal, vice principal and one assistant principal transferred from another secondary school in the sponsor federation. The new Principal has been working on the school site since February 2012. Two other assistant principals were recruited from the predecessor school and 13 members of teaching staff were retained from the predecessor school. Nine new teachers have been appointed.
- The academy council has both new members and some from the governing body of the predecessor school.
- The proportions of students with special educational needs who are supported through school action, school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs are above the national average. About a third of students are eligible for extra funding through the pupil premium.
- There has been extensive building work at the academy site prior to opening and this is continuing. This has so far involved creation of a new reception area, new toilets throughout the building, including facilities for girls, extensive internal refurbishment of classrooms and one laboratory, provision of a covered outside eating area, new windows in one teaching block and repairs to the roof of another. A planned schedule of building works is in place to improve and extend facilities across the whole-school site.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The academy, using support from the federation, has put in place an extensive programme of intervention to help students in the current Year 11 for GCSE examinations in 2013, particularly in mathematics and English. Creative use of staffing, grouping, one-to-one support, alterations to the curriculum and personalised programmes are all contributing to accelerated progress. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that in spite of this effort, given the below-average starting points of these students and the legacy of inadequate progress in previous years, the academy will not meet the government's minimum expectations for achievement at GCSE in 2013. Although improving, attendance of students in Year 11 is weaker than in other year groups and this is contributing to low achievement figures.

The academy has introduced an increasingly reliable system to track students' progress over time. Baseline assessment information was collected in September and since then progress has been measured twice. Although limited, this information

shows that the rate of progress for students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 is accelerating, so they are making similar and sometimes better progress than students nationally. This is particularly evident in mathematics. In English, there are improvements but they are not as fast and a smaller proportion of students are making expected progress. This limits how well they achieve in other subjects. Many students arrive at the academy with poor literacy skills. There is no systematic, consistent development of reading, writing and oral communication by all teachers through all subjects. During the inspection students were observed explaining some thoughtful and sophisticated ideas in religious education, but other evidence showed that they are not always able to express themselves so well in writing.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well looked after and are making similar progress to their peers. There are examples of accelerated progress for some. The gap between the progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and others is narrow and closing.

The quality of teaching

Students report that teaching is improving. Much of the teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers are beginning to learn how to make sure that every single student in each lesson is making the maximum progress. In the best lessons expectations are high and the teacher uses information from assessment to provide different work for students of different abilities. In many subjects, lessons are short. The most effective teachers make maximum use of the time, with a prompt start, a balance of activities and only limited teacher talk, so that students spend most of the time working. As a result, students make good progress because the pace is brisk and the work focused. The most confident teachers continue to teach individuals and small groups while others are working. In some lessons students make less progress because not enough time is allocated for them to work on their own; as a result, they complete less. Sometimes the teacher has not explained or modelled what good quality work will look like, so students do not know what they are aiming at.

There is a consistently applied and regular system for providing feedback to students, who are expected to respond to the advice and comments the teacher makes. Students say that this dialogue is helping them to know how to improve, although sometimes teachers do not give enough subject-specific detail. Overall, not enough attention is paid to developing good habits of presentation, writing and recording. Teachers do not routinely correct English spelling, grammar and punctuation. Effective work with the academy library is already contributing to developing reading skills, but the pace of improvement needs to accelerate, with all teachers being able to support literacy, including consistent knowledge of phonics to help the weakest readers.

Teachers are provided with useful up-to-date strategies to help meet the needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs. This information is not

consistently translated into personalised provision in the classroom. Students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable are helped to overcome their difficulties by the support provided by other adults, but teachers are not always using this assistance creatively in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The biggest challenge for senior leaders has been to make clear their authority and expectations of students' behaviour. They have trained teachers to manage behaviour in a professional, fair, firm and consistent way, so that students respond positively. This has been exceptionally successful. Exclusions are low, and students report that they understand sanctions well and appreciate the new system of rewards. The genial but constant staff presence in corridors encourages a warm and cooperative atmosphere. Disruptions to lessons are rare, and although a few older students are not always willing to engage with learning, they do not disturb others. This means that the conditions for teaching and learning are good and little time is wasted, although some teachers are not sufficiently confident that students will behave well and so do not risk more creative activities in the classroom. Many students lack self-confidence and ambition. The new pastoral system, with mixed-age tutor groups and communities based on the themes of respect, friendship and excellence, and a regular focus in assemblies on celebrating success and valuing effort are both helping to raise self-esteem. Younger students have adjusted well to the presence of girls in their lessons, but in older year groups the number of girls is small and boys are less used to them. Girls report that there is always someone to talk to if they have concerns. There is currently only one female senior leader in the academy to provide a strong role model.

Attendance is below average and is affecting students' achievement. However, the academy is making a new appointment for next term to tackle this problem.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The academy's leaders have successfully halted the decline of the predecessor school and have made their high expectations explicit to the whole academy community. Aspirations are rising and there is a tangible sense of optimism and purpose. The positive impact of strong leadership on students' behaviour and the quality of teaching has led staff to trust the Principal, and morale is high. There is no complacency. All staff are aware of what needs to be done to raise standards, and the absolute priority is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are provided with the coaching and training and they are ambitious to improve. A comprehensive system of performance management linked to the teachers' standards has been introduced.

There is a clear management structure. At the moment the senior team is small and the number of middle leaders limited, so it is easy for the Principal to keep abreast of progress. The pace of change is fast, actions are monitored and evaluated and planning modified week by week. However, as the academy expands, systems will need to be more robust to ensure consistency and rigour across a larger team. Regular milestones to show the impact of improvements in provision on achievement will help to sustain staff motivation and morale.

Although some modifications were made to the predecessor school curriculum for the academy opening in September, the Principal does not believe that the current curriculum is meeting the needs of all students effectively. A full curriculum review is underway and is already sufficiently well planned for Year 9 students to make their GCSE course choices later this term.

Parents from all year groups have already been asked for their views about the new academy and are overwhelmingly positive. They have been particularly complimentary about the care and support given to disabled students and those with special educational needs. Some have said that homework is not consistently provided and marked, and in response, a review of how homework is organised is underway.

Several governors from the predecessor school are now councillors on the new academy council. Other members, including the Chair, are new. They have been very well supported by the Cabot Learning Federation, who are providing expertise, experience and training. It is clear from the records of the council meetings that skills are developing quickly. Strengths and weaknesses are well understood and there is a relentless focus on monitoring and raising standards, and on gaining insight and information, with regular and robust challenge to the academy's leaders.

Some minor administrative omissions from the academy's single central record were put right during the inspection.

External support

The sponsoring organisation, Cabot Learning Federation, has provided extensive help with staffing, appointments and quality assurance in order to set up the academy successfully. Induction for the Principal, senior leaders and the academy council is ensuring a secure management infrastructure. The quality of teaching is improving as result of extensive professional development, support and coaching for staff. Support has given to academy finance and building site staff . Through the federation a wide range of opportunities have been made available to students to encourage them to look beyond their own community and raise their aspirations. Current Year 11 students valued their visit to other academies to find out about opportunities for post-16 provision across the federation.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the executive principal of the Cabot Learning Federation, the Chair of the Academy Council and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector