

Tribal  
1-4 Portland Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 0117 311 5359  
**Direct F** 0117 315 0430  
**Email:** christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

5 July 2013

Mr B Storry  
Headteacher  
Mount Tamar School  
Row Lane  
Higher St Budeaux  
Plymouth  
PL5 2EF

Dear Mr Storry

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Mount Tamar School**

Following my visit with Christina McIntosh, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 2 July 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 Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school. At the same time, social care inspectors from Ofsted carried out an inspection of residential provision under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools. There is a separate report of this inspection on the Ofsted website.

I sought to determine whether:

- behaviour management techniques are effective
- safeguarding practices meet requirements
- school leaders and managers are taking effective action to monitor and evaluate policy and practice.

## **Evidence**

Inspectors looked at the single central record used to detail the checks that are carried out when staff are employed at the school. We also looked at school policies and record-keeping related to safeguarding and behaviour. We visited all classes on a number of occasions and observed behaviour at lunchtime and break times. Meetings were held with a large number of staff, either individually or in small groups, and we spoke with students. Discussions took place with the headteacher and members of the leadership team, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority, including the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) for safeguarding. There were too few responses on the online survey, Parent View, to provide a summary of parental views of the school, but some parents and carers gave their views to the social care inspectors.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time: The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

## **Context**

There are currently 94 students on roll at the school. All have a statement of special educational needs, primarily for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are an increasing number of pupils with complex learning difficulties, for example, autistic spectrum disorders and communication difficulties. You joined the school in November 2012. Since then, you have reviewed a number of aspects related to teaching, the management of behaviour, and leadership and management. You have introduced a number of changes. A new Chair of the Governing Body took up post in April 2013. The governing body has been reconstituted and a number of new governors have been recruited.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students say they are happy at school and feel safe. Parents and carers agree. Observations during our visit show that, on the whole, the school is a calm working environment. Staff were clear with us that we had visited on a typical day and saw typical behaviour. Pupils and staff have good relationships. When behaviour is managed well in classrooms, staff have high expectations, the quality of learning is good and students work well together. Even when there are disruptions, involving individuals, other students continue to concentrate on the tasks while issues are quickly remedied. Students generally move around the site calmly. The staff are vigilant, ensuring that any inappropriate behaviour is challenged, and students respond to this well.

On your arrival at the school, you took appropriate action to ensure that the use of small rooms as part of a strategy to manage behaviour is compliant with current legislation and government guidance. A new fence has been erected around the site. Students are expected to remain on-site during the day. Parents and carers say that,

now they know their children will be on-site all day, this helps them feel that their children are safe. You also confirmed with staff the school's emphasis on de-escalation strategies to manage students' behaviour. It is now expected that incidents, if possible, should be resolved in the first instance by the staff supervising the students or by tutors who know students well. Staff have agreed a new behaviour policy. This clearly sets down aims and principles. A clear traffic light system to recognise good and bad behaviour is in place, and this is well monitored by the deputy headteacher. Risk assessments, personal support plans, behaviour targets and personalised interventions are in place for individual students. Reporting procedures, and procedures following incidents, have been clarified. You have rightly ensured that reporting of the most serious incidents are recorded and sent to the local authority when this is appropriate. Training for staff on restraint is regular and up to date.

Many of the procedures are relatively new. They are generally successful in ensuring a calm environment. You recognise they are not yet consistently effective throughout the school. Some of the individual behaviour plans and targets are not yet specific enough to ensure that pupils are learning quickly to manage their own behaviour. Restraints, although reducing, remain high. Due to a lack of detailed recording of the de-escalation strategies that are used prior to the restraint, and the lack of a follow-up with the students, learning from the incident is lost. The traffic light system is most effective with some of the secondary-age groups. A few staff say that follow-up by senior management is not yet consistent and this means that issues feel unresolved.

You have rightly recognised the link between effective learning, a good curriculum and good behaviour. You have reorganised teaching groups so those with the most complex needs can experience a more nurturing environment in small groups with familiar adults. There have been changes to the environment and more are planned, including improvements to the building. The school is developing a more vocational-based curriculum. It is early days. These changes have inevitably caused some disruption to staff and students. You have had to balance carefully the needs of students who find change challenging with the need to improve practice and respond to staff changes and recent staff sickness. Evidence shows that students are now responding well and focus well. Students talk about enjoying the support of smaller groups and that it is helping them learn. Parents and carers recognise the value of these small groups in improving the behaviour and progress of their children.

Evidence shows that, although attendance remains low when compared with national benchmarks, it has improved significantly. Exclusions have reduced. These are appropriately used for serious issues. There are suitable reintegration practices in place. The school maintains contact with parents and carers to ensure that students are safe if they are not attending school.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

All staff have the necessary checks prior to recruitment, which means that they are eligible to work with children. Child protection procedures are clear and work well. Procedures have recently been changed and are based on good practice that has been researched through working with other local schools. A new team approach has brought a greater clarity and transparency to the process while maintaining appropriate security and confidentiality. Further improvements are planned for September when the team of professionals will be able to use computer-based behavioural tracking to monitor students better and look at issues in a more holistic manner. All staff have had appropriate training in child protection. The school has a good and constructive relationship with the LADO. This means that issues are referred and followed up appropriately. The LADO will be delivering further training in September. The governors are appropriately informed of issues and have followed up issues themselves, when appropriate.

It is clear that you are ambitious for the school. The school development plan covers issues related to the quality of assessment, the management of behaviour and the improvement of curriculum. Where appropriate, it rightly focuses on the key issues from the previous Ofsted inspection. There is already clear progress and evidence of impact. However, the amount and speed of change have created some uncertainty. On certain issues, you had to take immediate and appropriate action, and respond to situations quickly. The vast majority of staff agree that changes are necessary. They recognise your passion for the school and are excited by the future. They are being held to account more and expectations on them have been raised. They welcome this. They feel procedures are clearer and systems tighter. They are being supported and welcome recent training and partnerships with other schools that have been established. They describe greater liaison between staff that is having a positive impact on the students. A minority of staff are very unhappy and do not trust the leaders of the school. They feel the changes are damaging to the students' safety and education. There is no evidence of this. However, the continued negative atmosphere and ongoing unresolved allegations and concerns are damaging, and are having an impact on the school's capacity to improve further. It is also clear that, in conversations with students, they are aware of personal and professional frictions. This is not supporting their learning and behaviour.

The governors are provided with appropriate reports and data to ensure that they are informed and can support the school. However, the lack of clear processes and, until recently, the small number of active governors has meant that some issues have not been tackled. A few staff have not felt governors have been effective in remedying issues quickly. Governors have recognised this. They are working tirelessly, in particular the new Chair of the Governing Body, to respond to complex issues. They have recruited more experienced governors. They work closely with the local authority. They are well placed, with ongoing training and support, which is already planned, to improve further.

## **External support**

The local authority is supportive of recent changes at the school. It is very aware of current issues and is working closely with the school to resolve these. The school has received good support from different officers. Human relations support is working to resolve individual cases and has supported the design of a new leadership structure. School improvement officers have kept close contact, and challenge and support when necessary. They appropriately recognise that frequent and visible support to the school is currently necessary. Governor services have been instrumental in strengthening the governing body. The school appreciates the on-going support of the LADO.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Work with all staff to confirm the vision for the school and the steps to be taken to realise this vision.
- Clarify the processes for staff, parents, carers and students to be able to make complaints or air grievances. Clarify how complaints and grievances will be addressed. Address current issues quickly.
- Ensure the consistency and quality of procedures to improve students' behaviour. Robustly monitor and evaluate these.
- Continue to work with the local authority to ensure that the governing body has sufficient training and capacity to deal effectively with complex current demands, as well as supporting and challenging the school robustly.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Plymouth, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**