

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 5323  
**Direct email:** suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com

11 November 2013

Mr Andy Mortimer  
The Interim Principal  
Bexhill High School  
Down Road  
Bexhill-on-Sea  
TN39 4BY

Dear Mr Mortimer

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Bexhill High School**

Following my visit with Chris Lewis, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Claire Gillies, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 6 and 7 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time: the academy is making reasonable progress toward the removal of special measures and the sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint further newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Academic Board and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve teaching considerably, so that by the summer of 2014, attainment at GCSE is broadly average and that, in the year between March 2013 and April 2014, at least an average proportion of students in Key Stage 3 make the expected progress, by:
  - increasing the pace and challenge in each lesson
  - raising teachers' expectations of what students can and should achieve ensuring all students are given work which precisely matches their assessed needs
  - improving the marking of students' work, so that it provides guidance which helps students to improve their work more quickly
  - not accepting work which is poorly presented.
- Enhance the curriculum, ensuring that the current interest and breadth in the curriculum are not lost by:
  - closely addressing students' needs in literacy and numeracy right from the start of Year 7
  - making sure the curriculum for Key Stage 3 students is appropriately planned, preparing them well for Key Stage 4
  - making sure that learning in Year 9 is more productive and used effectively to prepare students for the next phase of their education.
- Extend significantly the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
  - ensuring the senior leadership team has the capacity and necessary expertise to bring about the improvements needed, particularly in the key areas of teaching and the curriculum
  - holding middle leaders to account much more closely for the quality of provision and students' progress in their areas of responsibility
  - managing more robustly the school's work with disabled students, those with special educational needs and those supported by pupil premium funding, and checking carefully the impact of this work on the students concerned
  - evaluating the work of the school accurately, more regularly and in greater detail
  - sharpening school improvement planning
  - making sure that the monitoring of teaching focuses on the impact it is having on the progress students make and helps each individual teacher to improve, even where lessons are taught by more than one teacher
  - ensuring that teachers' assessments of students, and the school's data used to track students' progress, are well moderated, accurate and reliable

- improving the effectiveness of the performance management of staff undertaking an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 November 2013**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Interim Principal and Head of School, other senior staff, members of the interim academic board, a representative of Prospects Trust, other staff and groups of students. Inspectors accompanied senior staff during lesson observations, and also conducted lesson observations independently.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection two new Vice-Principals have joined, one as Head of School until July. The Interim Principal is in post for the rest of this academic year. Seventeen teachers have left, replaced by 16 new staff. Less teaching now takes place in large groups over long periods, although the majority of lessons are still taught collaboratively by two or more staff in 15 open-plan 'pods'.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The unvalidated 2013 GCSE results were up on the previous year, with students making better progress from their starting points, including in mathematics and English, and in arts-based subjects. Nevertheless, their progress and attainment remain below that seen nationally. There are particular concerns over the progress made by boys in English, students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for students in receipt of free school meals, looked after children and children of parents in the armed services) and more able students. Improved target setting means targets for current students are higher and being set by leaders so as to focus staff on closing the gaps between these students' performance and students nationally.

Current students now achieve more, but especially in the greater proportion of lessons, or sections of lessons, taught in smaller groups. There remains much to do to ensure students are always clear about what they are learning, or how to improve so as to hit their targets. However, they are aiming higher and students say they are being challenged more by what they are doing.

Progress remains too slow in many of the lessons involving large groups. Parts of these lessons where all students engage in activities such as discussion often engender too little learning as students do not participate fully. This particularly affects less able students who need more direct support to get involved. Inspectors saw too many instances when students could not hear or see properly, or were given too few opportunities to respond to questions. Once students break into small groups, as is more typical now, they make better progress but, by then, learning time has often been lost.

## **The quality of teaching**

Teachers make more use of information about students' attainment to plan their lessons and meet the needs of each student. They understandably find this easier in smaller classes rather than large groups. It is good to see teachers asking more questions which test and extend students' knowledge. However, teachers do not all enable students to think independently enough, for example by exemplifying how to assess each other's work in the now more frequent opportunities they have to do this. When teaching the large groups, good progress has been made by staff in identifying which staff are responsible for which students. But checking and supporting all students' progress in these circumstances are a significant challenge, as is the effective deployment of teaching assistants. As a result, both remain patchy in their effectiveness.

The potential advantages of teaching large groups have not materialised and there are not many examples nationally which the academy could use to support staff training. The very best staff, working together, can secure good student progress, and there are times when working as a large group is effective. However, the current teaching spaces are not flexible enough to allow staff to choose when to use this approach, and teaching is not good enough to overcome the difficulties. Faced with this, academy leaders have sensibly broken long sessions down into smaller parts. This helps, but means teachers' explanations, introductions and lesson summaries involve too many students to ensure all learn well.

On a brighter note, teachers' marking is better. Books show students being given more guidance for improvement so as to hit their targets, and more staff require students to respond to marking. Students said they were being picked up on poor presentation, and we could see examples of 'do this again please' being acted on.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students behave well and want to learn. The large majority are respectful of each other, tolerant of diversity and feel safe and well cared for by staff. The 'heart space' at the centre of the academy building is a boon to social development. In spite of the complex arrangement of staggered break times, students behave sensibly in this area, which is adjacent to classrooms and where noise would be disruptive.

Attendance remains below average. The previous inspection noted improvement, but academy leaders are rightly unhappy with the rate of change. Procedures are being tightened and lower attending groups supported to come in more often. There needs to be closer monitoring of the link between attendance and achievement and clearer communication to parents about the impact of their children missing school.

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

The Interim Principal and Head of School have taken good steps to improve leadership. The senior leadership team is making a greater impact, with new appointees and existing members taking on areas such as student assessment or

improving teaching. The role of some long-standing members is unclear and needs to be decided swiftly so all pull in the same direction.

A well-focused review of target setting for students, how their progress is checked and the information used to plan teaching, is about to be finalised. It is helpful that at the start of this term, subject leaders were confirmed in each area, albeit with senior staff covering some areas due to shortages of able or willing staff. The line management of these leaders has been clarified. They are receiving suitable training from senior staff in observing lessons, supporting teachers and analysing assessment information to draw up subject development plans. The management of staff performance has also been the subject of a timely review. The better organised assessment system is poised to supply the previously missing ingredient in managing performance: checking the impact staff make on students' progress. I look forward to seeing how this is being used on my next visit, as indeed I do the impact of a review of pupil premium spending. This has identified the sums involved and what they go on. Leaders know the next step is to check it is spent on what works.

Senior leaders are working hard to improve teaching. They have sustained staff morale but have a significant number of new staff, including newly qualified teachers. These were offered posts ahead of my last letter advising against the appointment of any but experienced teachers. Our joint observations with senior staff show they have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and are improving practice through training. Nevertheless, they are unable to make enough headway on developing teachers' skills in using the big spaces and big groups, and must either do more to tackle this or change the nature of the spaces.

Some good work has been done to re-organise the curriculum and the timings of the day, but these too are restricted by the nature of the teaching spaces. Lower attaining Year 7 students are better supported through the new Phoenix group, which offers a strong focus on areas such as literacy. Three pathways for students of different ability and/or areas of interest are more clearly defined as they move into Key Stage 4. The process of agreeing 'with' students which is most suitable is now better and students like the move to starting Key Stage 4 courses in Year 9.

A good review of provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs has improved decisions about support and has led to better teaching in areas such as the Phoenix group. Staff training is improving, including for additional adults. All staff are more aware of these students' needs but are not yet meeting them in all day-to-day teaching.

The Interim Principal and Head of School are working hard to build the confidence of the local community. Evidence suggests this is happening, for example with a positive response from prospective parents at open evenings.

The interim academic board is receiving better information about students' progress and is asking more probing questions. A detailed breakdown of the 2013 academy results enabled it to check the progress of different groups and subjects. The

members are rightly keen to do more work like this so as to make sure performance continues improving. Their knowledge and skills are growing through the support of a Trust adviser now working with them. However, to move toward the return of a full governing body, they recognise the requirement for more training and additional members with greater educational expertise.

### **External support**

The provision of the Interim Principal is underpinning the academy's improvement. A decision to seek a substantive Principal for September 2014 is welcome. The addition of the adviser to bolster the interim academic board is helping its work to hold leaders to account. The sponsor's action plan, unfit for purpose at the first visit, has been updated to address the deficiencies and remedy the weaknesses. However, to get the academy ready for the removal of special measures within two years of the inspection, the plan must now include clear decisions about adapting the classroom spaces to make them more suitable for teaching. It must also break down in greater detail the overall GCSE targets set into targets for each year group and sizeable group of students so progress can be checked more easily.