

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 5323
Direct email: suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com

14 November 2013

Mr M Trusson
Principal
The Taunton Academy
Cheddon Road
Taunton
TA2 7QP

Dear Mr Trusson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Taunton Academy

Following my visit to your academy with Howard Dodd, additional inspector, on 13 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weakness designation.

The sponsor's statement of action is now fit for purpose.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Somerset, the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education and the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

Yours sincerely

Marcia Headon
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - eradicating any that is inadequate
 - ensuring all lessons include a range of interesting activities that challenge the full ability range
 - including regular reviews of learning in lessons that inspire students to work harder and clarify what is needed to excel
 - including more challenging questioning that requires all students to think more deeply and provide more extended responses
 - ensuring students have the time to respond fully to marking and other feedback
 - ensuring teaching assistants are able to provide effective support to named individuals in lessons
 - ensuring students appreciate how individual lessons relate to their longer term targets
 - ensuring all staff consistently apply the academy's behaviour management policy.

- Accelerate students' achievement by:
 - enhancing middle leaders' abilities to evaluate performance in their areas of responsibility, hold staff to account and learn from the good practice that exists in the academy and beyond at all levels within the academy
 - ensuring the progress made by different groups, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, is given a higher priority
 - ensuring all improvement plans contain more details of the progress to be made by all groups of students, thereby making the regular checking by the governing body more straightforward
 - developing more interventions for younger students, particularly related to reading, so they learn the skills and knowledge required to succeed in Year 9 and onwards
 - improving the level of engagement with parents and carers, particularly of those students eligible for support through the pupil premium.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 November 2013

Evidence

The inspectors met with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, a group of middle leaders, the academy improvement partner, representatives of the sponsor and two members of the governing body. The inspectors observed 15 lessons, 13 of which were jointly observed with members of the leadership team. In lessons, inspectors talked to students and viewed their work. Inspectors scrutinised documentation to show evidence of the work taken to improve standards. These included external reports provided to the academy and the latest academy development plans.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in April 2013, the building works have been largely completed and the academy is now on one site. It had previously been on two sites, one mile apart.

There have been significant changes made to staffing. New heads of department have taken up posts in music and drama and a new special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has been appointed. Two new lead practitioners have been appointed in mathematics and science, five newly qualified teachers have been appointed and seven new graduate teaching assistants have joined the staff. The special educational needs (SEN) department has been restructured. The Vice-Chair of the Governing Body has now stepped down and a new governor has been appointed by the diocese. He is now the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The Principal has remained determined to establish consistent systems across the academy and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. New systems have been introduced, including the academy lesson plan, expectations for marking and revised tracking procedures. While progress has been made on introducing these initiatives, their impact is not yet evident in all areas. Since September, the rate of improvement towards the removal of the serious weakness designation plan has accelerated, but overall progress has been too slow since the inspection in February 2013.

Students did not attain highly enough in the GCSE examinations in summer 2013 or make enough progress when their starting points are considered. The percentage of students who achieved five good-quality GCSEs including English and mathematics fell from the previous year to well below the national average. The gap in achievement between those students in receipt of pupil premium (funding allocated to provide extra support for students who are eligible for free school meals, are in

the care of the local authority or are from service families) and others is still too wide.

The senior leadership has been restructured to establish more focused roles for the vice-principals, but the overall balance of the whole leadership team has not yet placed sufficient emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate students' progress and achievement. This is acknowledged by the academy and the governors are considering revised proposals.

Senior leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching including daily learning walks through the academy. Their judgements on the quality of teaching seen in the lessons observed on the monitoring visit agreed with those of the inspectors. However, their judgements over time on the quality of teaching in English were higher than those of the inspectors.

Middle managers work well together, share a clear vision of what needs to be done and are beginning to check the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. They regularly conduct short visits to the lessons of teachers in their departments and look at the students' books in their subjects. However, because of ongoing staffing issues, the time available for their leadership role has been limited. As a result, they have not yet been afforded the opportunity to carry out longer visits to lessons but plans exist for this to happen from January 2014.

Middle managers are held to account more tightly for the work of their departments and the achievement of students in their subjects. The academy conducts departmental reviews which are thorough and involve external consultants to help validate the process. The academy has recently commissioned an external review of the curriculum and the recommendations from this are now being considered.

Governors now have a clearer view of the work of the academy. They visit more regularly and are asking more robust and challenging questions of the senior leadership team. The Chair meets with the Principal regularly and governors are checking the progress of the academy against the statement of action.

The governors' teaching and learning committee is fully involved in evaluating students' progress. It is more aware of how the pupil premium has been allocated and its intended outcomes. The governors receive detailed reports from the academy, but some of the information that they are provided with is too complex and does not help them in obtaining a strategic overview.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Staff fully understand the priorities of the academy and are committed to raising the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievement. There is an open culture of teachers helping each other and providing critical

feedback. They understand the expectations which the academy has laid down.

- There has been a strong emphasis upon ensuring that staff consistently apply the academy's behaviour policy and this has been successful. Students have responded well to the tiered approach to behaviour management and the rate of fixed-term exclusions has fallen. There was generally a calm, purposeful atmosphere on the day of the inspection.
- Since September 2013, the academy's more comprehensive tracking system has enabled teachers to identify those students who are underachieving at an earlier stage. The majority of teachers use this information to help target more effective questioning in lessons and to require students to think more deeply. In a Year 8 history lesson, the teacher used her prior knowledge of students' attainment to challenge a more-able pupil to provide a more detailed answer on conditions for children in factories in the 1840s.
- The academy's emphasis upon literacy and the introduction of the accelerated reading scheme is beginning to improve the reading ages of the students. The academy's data for 2012/13 shows that Year 9 pupils have made more progress in reading than nationally. A new lead practitioner with responsibility for literacy has recently taken up his post. However, the academy knows there is still more to be done in this area.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- There is still considerable inconsistency in the quality of teaching. During the visit, too many lessons were judged to be inadequate in English and in lower sets. In some lessons, students did not make enough progress as work was either too easy or too difficult. Teachers did not always give them sufficient direction or show them an example of how to begin a piece of work or provide enough support for weaker students. In a science lesson on muscles, the pace of learning was slower than expected as students struggled to understand the activity which had been set as there was insufficient explanation given.
- Student attainment and progress in English Language fell significantly in the GCSE examinations in summer 2013 and was well below national averages. The English department had not predicted these results. The pupil premium money was not used effectively in English where only 12% of pupils eligible for free school meals obtained a grade C or better. The department is now tracking the performance of students very assiduously.
- The introduction of a revised marking system has begun to provide students with clearer guidance on how they can improve their work. The majority of students know the levels at which they are working and can explain how the

comments from teachers are designed to help them with the next piece of work. Nevertheless, students do not always act on this advice and some marking is not sufficiently detailed or frequent. Teachers do not always allow enough time for students to consider the comments they have made or to respond fully and make corrections.

- The academy's revised process for tracking student progress ensures that staff are more aware of the need to provide extra support for those pupils who are in receipt of the pupil premium money. The academy has surveyed Year 11 students to find out how they consider the money would best help them. By allocating a sum of money directly to the parents and carers of the pupil premium students it has also engaged parents and carers of these pupils more with their learning. However, the academy has not presented a full analysis of the effectiveness of last year's spending to the governing body.
- Despite training and the introduction of the academy lesson plan, teachers' planning is not of a consistently high quality. In too many lessons, tasks are not well matched to the varying needs of the students within the class. Lesson objectives are stated but sometimes these are more about the activities which are to be undertaken than the learning which is being expected. This was particularly evident in lower sets and at Key Stage 3 in English.
- All students have been issued with a tablet computer which means they can access a wider range of interesting resources more easily. Some teachers use these well in their lessons, guiding students to sites, encouraging them to video spoken presentations which students can then view and consider how to improve. However, in other lessons, they are used by students as a distraction from the task in hand and as an excuse to look things up and copy, rather than to think things out for themselves. They are sometimes used inappropriately and in one lesson observed this went unnoticed by the class teacher.

External support

The diocese and the local authority as joint sponsors have begun to work together more closely to provide much stronger support and guidance to the academy. They have commissioned a leadership review and the diocese has appointed a new experienced governor who has taken over the role of Chair of the achievement and teaching committee. The sponsors are checking on progress at regular intervals either by receiving reports or by direct visits. However, there is still an overarching debate about the sponsorship arrangements which risks distracting the sponsors and governors from the main business of raising standards. Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the sponsors have now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. It now contains details of how

they intend to hold the academy to account and the level of resources which they will provide.