

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 5307
Direct email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

4 December 2013

Ruth Bovill
Headteacher
Heathermount School
Devenish Road
Ascot
SL5 9PG

Dear Ms Bovill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heathermount School

Following my visit to your school on 3 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. An additional advisory visit to the school took place in September 2013.

At the first monitoring inspection in March 2013 school leaders were taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection when the school was removed from special measures. However, since the first monitoring inspection and the advisory visit in September 2013, the pace of improvement has slowed and too much teaching still requires improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- eradicate inadequate teaching and promote a culture in which teachers welcome feedback as part of their professional development
- ensure that teachers set targets to improve students' academic progress in addition to their social and behavioural skills
- make sure that teachers match lesson activities and topics to the needs of the students, particularly in English
- hold teachers to account for the progress of individual students.

Evidence

During the visit meetings were held with you, the Governing Body and a member of the Disabilities Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and my previous advisory visit. I evaluated information about students' current progress, a recent staff questionnaire and a parent questionnaire. I observed teaching jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, held a brief meeting with all staff and gave some individual feedback to teachers following observations of teaching.

Context

Since my previous advisory visit in September 2013, the school improvement partner, who had previously been the executive principal, left her post.

Main findings

The quality of teaching has not improved strongly enough since my visits in March and September 2013. School leaders have rightly identified that too much teaching requires improvement and some is inadequate. Senior leaders know the school has not improved enough and that their responses to weaknesses have not been effective.

Some teachers are not clear enough about what they want students to learn and they do not match activities to the particular needs and skills of the students. Some teachers have low expectations of what the students can do for themselves and provide limited opportunities for students to work independently. In some cases teachers spend too much time talking when leading discussions and this does not promote students' use of expressive and receptive language. In some lessons the resources provided for students are not helpfully set out to support students with additional needs. Some teaching areas do not have useful displays to celebrate students' work or to be used as a resource. Students' learning is not enhanced by the available technology.

Senior leaders are visiting lessons to monitor teaching, but actions following observations have not yet been effective in improving teaching. Teachers are very aware that their work is being scrutinised and judged by senior leaders, but their training needs are not being tackled effectively. More needs to be done to ensure that teachers really understand what a good lesson looks like and to share their own good practice to improve teaching as a whole. There is no appropriate and effective system in school to hold teachers to account for the progress of students in their classes. At present, senior leaders do not meet individual staff regularly to discuss students' progress and their provision. Teachers set targets for students mainly based on their social and behavioural needs, rather than ensuring that they have

appropriate academic targets that will enable their skills to develop and prepare them for the next steps.

Most teachers support students well with their emotional and behavioural needs and students acquire increased social and communication skills. In a few lessons students are active and given sufficient responsibility for tasks, notably in the catering course where students were given frequent reminders about the processes of thinking and decision making. In this lesson there were high expectations of students' verbal communication. Students took the work seriously and worked with calm purpose to produce lunch for the whole governing body. During the monitoring inspection I also observed some examples of effective one-to-one teaching in which patient emotional support was sensitively blended with a deep understanding of students' learning processes.

Following my advisory visit to the school in September 2013 school leaders have now ensured that their roles are clear and they have revised the school action plan in line with their responsibilities. All staff and some governors have attended a full-day's training session to update them on safeguarding, child protection and whistle-blowing policy and practice. When I met the staff it was clear that they want to improve and work together as a team for the best interests of the students. According to the recent survey, a significant number of staff have raised concerns about communication between staff and senior leaders, the future plans for the school and the management of students' behaviour. It is important that these concerns are tackled swiftly.

Governors have also attended training to support their role and are now much more involved in the day-to-day life of the school, are questioning senior leaders more astutely and are beginning to evaluate the progress of students more closely. For example, governors are aware that progress in mathematics is better than in English. However, governors are less clear about how effectively school leaders are tackling this significant weakness. Work has continued to support the staff's well-being through the Disabilities Trust. Parents are positive about the care for individual students in the school.

The slow rate of improvement is a cause for concern. I will continue to visit regularly to provide further support and challenge for the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has successfully recruited a new school improvement partner, who will be taking up the post in January 2014. School leaders have set up a helpful link with a neighbouring mainstream secondary school. Teachers have observed teaching in the partner school and plans are in place to develop a coaching programme.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Windsor and Maidenhead and as below.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The service Director of the Disabilities Trust – Anna Headley
- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy