

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

6 March 2014

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 6 March 2014, 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 third 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. The first monitoring inspection took place in May 2013 and the second took place in December 2013. An additional advisory visit took place in September 2013.

School leaders and governors are now taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The school should take further action to:

- embed more accurate and effective methods of tracking, analysing and evaluating students' progress
- further develop the leadership of teaching through professional development and coaching
- fully establish the roles and responsibilities of the new team of middle leaders.

Evidence

During the visit meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the new team of middle leaders, two members of staff and a member of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last section 5 inspection and the previous monitoring inspection. Documentation relating to students' progress, governors' minutes and the school action plan were evaluated. I made short visits to lessons, accompanied by you and the deputy headteacher.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in December 2013 there have been no significant changes to the context.

Main findings

Teaching has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and more teaching is good. Teachers' planning now takes much more account of what students know and can do, and is tailored specifically to the needs of individual students. At the previous monitoring inspection, some classrooms looked drab and uninviting and students' learning was not enhanced by the technology available. This is no longer the case. Teachers now provide a better range of interesting resources for students to use and classroom displays are tidier and more helpful. Following the last monitoring inspection, a decision was made to rearrange some groups of students, which has resulted in more focused teaching, better deployment of staff and increased progress. Students observed during the monitoring inspection were working at a more suitable pace for their ability. They were also working with a greater sense of purpose and interest, communicating productively with adults and each other.

School leaders have ensured that teachers and teaching assistants benefit from more training to support planned improvements. An experienced teacher has delivered training on what better teaching looks like, which has helped staff to be more reflective and thoughtful about their work. Teaching assistants have also received training in better approaches to supporting learning and are now attached to particular classes, which is having a beneficial impact on continuity for students. Teaching assistants support students with both learning and behaviour, enabling teachers to concentrate fully on teaching. During the monitoring inspection teachers and teaching assistants clearly demonstrated greater enjoyment in their work and showed increasing confidence.

Teachers are now using a 'class profile' planning sheet, which includes up to date assessment data and information about the learning and behavioural needs of students in their classes. During the monitoring inspection it was clear that teachers were making effective use of this information to plan lessons. Senior leaders have accumulated much more assessment information about students, but it is not clear

how they are analysing and interpreting this information at year, group or individual student level. The school has not yet developed effective systems to capture and record detailed assessments of the development and progress of the younger students. Meetings with class teachers and teaching assistants to discuss students' progress have been set up, but senior leaders have identified that more needs to be done to find the right model for this to work well.

Significant improvements have been made to the leadership and management of the school and this is having a notably positive impact on staff morale. Senior leaders wisely took the decision to pilot a group of middle leaders to take on some of the day-to-day operational management, such as leadership of teaching assistants, family liaison, the management of the site and the day-to-day deployment of staff. This new system of leadership has not only enabled senior leaders to focus on teaching, but has also provided professional development for key staff. Staff are now working with more energy, determination and sense of purpose. All the staff I spoke to could point to more openness of communication, increased levels of responsibility and, most importantly, a sharp focus on learning and preparing students for the next steps. As one member of staff said, 'it feels like a school now'. Expectations are higher and staff welcome support and guidance.

Governors now have a much clearer idea of what needs to be done to improve the school and ask more searching and strategic questions of school leaders. Governors now visit the school more often and observe teaching. They receive daily updates from the school and also more detailed reports on a regular basis.

I will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has benefited from the work of a school improvement partner who has reviewed the action plan, visited lessons and supported leadership. He is in frequent contact with the school. The school also benefits from a partnership with the neighbouring mainstream secondary school. At the time of the monitoring inspection, plans were in place for staff to observe specialist teaching in the partner school. However, it is not clear what the key aims of the partnership are and how this work will be evaluated.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector