

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

28 February 2014

Mr Andy Mortimer  
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 Diana Choulerton, Her Majesty's Inspector and Robin Gaff, Additional inspector, to your academy on 26 and 27 February, 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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 towards the removal of special measures, and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) may be appointed.

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 third monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 February 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors met the interim Principal and Head of School, members of the interim academic board (IAB), a representative from Prospects Trust, which sponsors the academy, other staff in positions of responsibility, and groups of students. They talked to students around the academy site and observed lessons, including some jointly with senior staff. The lead inspector met the design consultant working on reconfiguring the teaching spaces.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection a permanent principal has been appointed, to take up her post in September 2014. A new Chair of the IAB has been appointed, who is also Chief Executive of the sponsoring Trust and has chaired a number of meetings. A local former headteacher has joined the IAB in a consultancy capacity. Seven staff have left, including two senior leaders, and six new staff have joined; four on long-term supply contracts. New arrangements for the school day started recently with an earlier finish and the introduction of tutor group meetings. One of the academy's 15 large teaching 'pods' has been adapted to explore the use of partitions to make three spaces; and trials continue of different configurations.

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

Students' progress is accelerating over time. They are working toward more challenging targets, exemplified by current Year 11 students who aim to achieve more than last year's cohort across a wider range of subjects. They are enjoying their learning more and the gaps between different groups of students, evident in last year's GCSE results, are starting to close. For example, students in receipt of free school meals are making better progress from their starting points, as are boys in English. Students' progress in lessons is improving. They are getting work which is more challenging and more teaching is of the quality which helps them gain a better grasp of key ideas underpinning lessons. This continues to be more often seen in the lessons or parts of lessons involving smaller groups, and less evident in the sessions with large groups. In these situations, less-able students are often unclear about what to do and are less confident in responding to questions or discussions. They therefore fall further behind. Achievement among the lowest attaining pupils, including in the Year 7 Phoenix group, needs to show clearer acceleration over time.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching is improving with more good and outstanding practice as staff respond to training. However, staff turnover in some subjects, and the continued challenge of

teaching in the large pods, means too much teaching is still not good enough. There has been steady improvement in the proportion of staff providing work in lessons at differing levels of challenge so as to match students' varied abilities. The same is true of the proportion who check progress in lessons and adjust content accordingly. In the strongest teaching, staff break learning down into sections, establish clear understanding at each stage and build learning sequentially. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson on vaccination, students learned first about the historical context for the discovery of vaccines, before considering their social impact. In these lessons staff teach for understanding and check through techniques such as questioning that it is working. However, this practice is inconsistent across the academy. Too many staff struggle to communicate ideas, to engage students or to check their progress, notably when teaching the large groups but also in some smaller classes.

The improvements in the assessment of students' progress, underway at the time of the last monitoring inspection, have been built on by staff so that students' progress toward targets is more closely checked. Better additional support is provided for students who are behind so they are starting to catch up. Year 11 students welcome the more detailed teaching they get in extra support sessions. Students are clearer about their target grades, and appreciate feedback about their progress via marking and assessments, which are improving steadily.

Lessons taught in the divided pod show that small groups can focus more easily but also that noise carries over between the spaces because, due to fire safety rules and ventilation requirements, the walls cannot go to the ceiling. The volume is lower than when the open spaces are used for smaller groups, so offers a way forward if the noise pollution can be reduced further.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The academy retains its pleasant atmosphere in social spaces and between lessons, with good relationships between staff and students the norm. The great majority of students say they feel well cared for by staff. Most are keen to learn in their lessons, and remain focused even when teaching is not engaging. The academy now has better systems to deal with students who do not behave well and this has led to a reduction of incidents of poor behaviour. The Year 8 nurture group is a good example of a support programme that has improved behaviour. As a result of these strategies the number of fixed-term exclusions has decreased and no students have been permanently excluded since September 2013. The academy is working hard to manage students placed with it by the local authority after exclusion from other schools. Having to do this is, however, unhelpful to the academy at this stage of its development, which while improving, is still fragile.

The academy is working hard to improve attendance. Staff link more closely with the local authority to respond to unauthorised absence, moving swiftly now to a legal process and sending a clear message to families about the consequences of non-

attendance. The number of persistently absent students remains too high but is falling, although students supported by the pupil premium are over-represented among poor attending students. The academy is wisely using pupil premium money to buy-in support staff from the local authority to tackle this, and is well focused on monitoring the impact.

Most students spoken to welcomed the new arrangements for the day but it is too early to evaluate the full impact of this strategy on behaviour or academic outcomes.

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

Working together, the interim Principal and the head of school have provided clear direction for improvement. They are supported increasingly well by other senior colleagues, many taking on extra work previously done by the departed senior staff.

Senior leaders have improved the school development plan by adding measurable targets for students' achievement, clearer actions to bring change in key areas such as teaching, and by involving staff more in drafting it. It still has too few measurable targets for different groups of students, and too little evaluative reflection to identify the next steps. Crucially, the plan now needs to show how a transition will be effected to the leadership of the new principal so as to build on what the academy is achieving, and to show a clear timeline for the changes to the buildings.

Remodelling the teaching spaces is being approached sensibly by leaders. Working with the sponsor trust and the IAB, the senior team have engaged consultants to test and review options. This is work in progress but leaders' drive to sort out the problem reflects their awareness of the urgency involved. A review of the curriculum is sensibly linked to the redesign of teaching spaces, as the number of rooms available dictates the organisation and delivery of lessons.

Leaders' energetic monitoring and improvement of teaching are bearing fruit. There are good plans to adapt staff development to reflect changes to building design, which may lead to less reliance on large-group teaching. Teachers are being set clearer targets for development, and the more accurate system for assessing students' progress makes it easier for leaders to check teachers' impact on learning. Teachers who have not responded to support have been managed out of the academy. The next steps are to link the monitoring of teachers' performance and students' progress to salary progression, and to bring stable staffing to all subjects.

Monitoring the impact of provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs and the effectiveness of pupil premium spending has improved through more reference to the impact on pupils' progress. Staff understand well that these areas of work need to be adapted if the fabric of the building and the design of the curriculum are altered as this will necessitate different deployment, for example, of additional adults.

The IAB continues to improve its capacity to monitor the academy. Training from the consultant on analysing student performance data has helped IAB members in initial meetings with subject leaders to check their impact on their areas of responsibility. The IAB is suitably involved in adaptations to the building and the curriculum.

Subject leaders, responding to clearer guidance from line managers, are becoming more involved in monitoring students' progress and the quality of teaching. However, they are not yet involved enough in leading the development of teaching in their subjects.

Senior staff have continued to reach out to the community: a meeting with parents and carers to explain the new school day saw a very large turn-out; business breakfasts for the local business community offer the potential to enrich the business curriculum; and rekindled links with local schools signal a welcome desire on the academy's part to improve aspects such as the transition of Year 6 pupils into Year 7.

### **External support**

Effective support from the sponsor has supported areas such as appointing the new Principal, planning the adaptations to the building and bolstering the work of the IAB through bringing in the consultant. The sponsor maintains a good level of awareness of developments at the academy through the work of a linked advisor, and is equally keen to sustain the progress made over the coming period of transition.