

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
Email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

14 May 2014

Mr Jonathan Dennett
Headteacher
Fitzharrys School
Northcourt Road
Abingdon
OX14 1NP

Dear Mr Dennett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fitzharrys School

Following my visit to your school on 13 May, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that governors, senior leaders and middle leaders thoroughly understand the different ways in which pupil progress information collated by teaching group (known as the 'performance dashboard') can be used to raise achievement
- make sure that governors scrutinise this information and use it to hold the school to account for its progress towards good.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, the head of sixth form, a panel of sixth form students and a representative from both Faringdon Community College and the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Your deputy

headteacher and I visited a range of English, mathematics and science lessons, including two sixth form lessons. I also evaluated the school's action plans.

Context

Since the last inspection two teachers have left the school: the head of the art department and a science teacher.

Main findings

The governing body is providing the school with high quality support and challenge. The changes they have made are well-considered. They include setting up a new panel which focuses on how well pupils are achieving. As a result of an ever-sharper understanding of the information provided by the school, the governing body is asking increasingly penetrating questions. The minutes of meetings are presented in a helpful question and answer format which clearly identifies where governors are challenging senior leaders about the school's performance. Governors who have expertise in managing targets for staff performance are using this know-how to challenge leaders and teachers to raise standards rapidly. The Chair of the Governing Body currently supports a local school in improving governance.

You and your leaders are making effective use of a wider range of markers to judge the quality of teaching. Leaders are sensibly using the information gathered from this monitoring to identify teachers' individual training needs. As a consequence the guidance and support they provide for teachers is tailor-made. However, as yet middle leaders are not routinely involved in evaluating teaching in their subject areas. You have plans in place to resolve this but they are not being implemented with enough urgency.

Your senior leaders have a strong resolve to move the school to good. They are supporting middle leaders more effectively. As a result, middle leaders are starting to take greater responsibility for improving outcomes in their subject areas. However, the way your senior leaders are holding middle leaders to account is still not consistently effective. To help senior leaders to challenge middle leaders, you are usefully collating information on progress by teaching group. You refer to this as a 'performance dashboard'. It is a priority to ensure this 'performance dashboard' identifies student groups, for example those entitled to additional 'pupil premium' funding, and is promptly ready to be used to hold both senior and middle leaders to account.

Sixth form students appreciate the more structured links teachers are making between the tasks they set and the specific skills needed to achieve higher grades. However there is too much inconsistency in how well different teachers carry this out. This lack of consistency is compounded by the fact that some students attend lessons delivered by a local consortium of providers. Your school is organising a

teaching and learning conference for teachers across the consortium to try to resolve this problem. The local authority school intervention leader has also agreed to support the school in its efforts to achieve greater consistency across the consortium.

The school action plan contains too much information from previous audits. As a result it is not focused sharply enough on the areas for improvement from the most recent inspection report. The timescales in the plan are too vague to support school leaders in checking whether actions have been completed on time. The plan's use of traffic light colours to monitor progress is inconsistent. Where actions are identified as 'red', detail is not provided about the steps needed to achieve a 'green' rating on the next check. However, governors are effectively monitoring sections of the plan.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is being supported by Faringdon Community College and a local authority led task group. The task group was previously led by an external consultant commissioned by the local authority. Following quality assurance undertaken by the local authority, this task group is now being led by the local authority's school intervention leader. The school intervention leader and Faringdon Community College are becoming clearer about how best to monitor and evaluate the impact of external partnerships. As a result of the extensive support Faringdon Community College have provided to date, they have a highly developed understanding of what is now needed to move the school to good. The local authority rightly recognises that Faringdon Community College have an important role to play in monitoring the effectiveness of the task group's actions.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector