

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 3115307
Direct email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

26 June 2014

Mr J Whitcombe
Executive Headteacher
The North School
Essella Road
Ashford
TN24 8AL

Dear Mr Whitcombe

Special measures monitoring inspection of The North School

Following my visit with Helen Hutchings, Additional inspector, and David Webster, Additional inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 June 2014, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Before the next monitoring inspection the school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers in each of the following subject areas: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and design and technology.

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 Governing Body and the Corporate Director of Education,
Learning and Skills for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan their lessons to take account of the needs of different groups of students
 - have higher expectations of both achievement and behaviour of students in lessons
 - make lessons more interesting in order to engage students more effectively in learning.
- Improve achievement and ensure that it is consistent across all groups of students and across all subjects by:
 - ensuring that teachers have accurate information on the standards and progress of the students they teach and use this information effectively in their teaching and marking of work
 - improving students' literacy skills so that they are better equipped to make progress in all subjects.
 - tackling underachievement of particular groups of students, particularly those who are eligible for pupil premium funding
 - reviewing the policy for early GCSE entry to ensure that students attain to their potential, particularly so that more-able students achieve the high grades.
- Improve the behaviour and safety of the pupils at the school by:
 - dealing effectively with low-level disruption in lessons and behaviour around the school
 - taking action to ensure that all students feel safe in all parts of the school site.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - focusing more intensively on raising achievement and improving teaching as the key priorities for leaders and managers at all levels
 - strengthening monitoring and evaluation so that leaders and managers at all levels know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what to do to improve
 - improving robustness and accuracy in the monitoring of teaching and providing high-quality support to help individual teachers to improve
 - ensuring governors are more effective in holding to account leaders and managers in school.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 June 2014

Evidence

Inspectors met you and the head of school, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, other staff in positions of responsibility, teaching staff, groups of students and parents and carers. They observed lessons, most of these jointly with senior staff, and scrutinised documents.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection one of the associate deputy headteachers has become the head of school, and two new assistant headteachers have joined the school. A new head of science has been appointed. The new governing body has been formed with its first meeting scheduled for 26 June. Nineteen teachers are joining the school for the new school year; three on long-term supply contracts. Eighteen teachers are leaving, including four on supply contracts. New arrangements for the school day and the school's pastoral structure commence at the end of this month.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' progress in Years 7 to 11 is now routinely checked. Information collected shows that the rate of students' progress is improving but remains too variable between different groups of students and subjects. The school's information shows that the proportion of students on track to attain five A* to C grades at GCSE this summer is a considerable increase on last year. Leaders moved quickly to ensure Year 11 students received the support needed to help them improve. Current progress in Year 10 is not as promising. However, the accuracy of some the information collected is questionable as assessment methods used are not always appropriate. For example, in mathematics students are assessed using GCSE past papers which include topics they have not yet covered, so judgements about students' progress are inaccurate. New improved approaches are being developed to provide clearer information on which students need support to help them catch up.

Students' literacy skills are in many cases underdeveloped. Although in some lessons useful strategies and techniques are used, teachers mostly do not provide the specific instructions or practical examples that students need to help them improve their literacy. Too many students eligible for pupil premium funding are not catching up with their peers and some are falling further behind. Two new senior leaders have been appointed to help resolve these issues. Appropriate and comprehensive plans are in place.

Students are no longer entered for English or mathematics GCSE early.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. There is now very little inadequate teaching and the amount of good teaching is increasing. In better lessons, teachers are clear about what students need to learn in order to make progress. Work engages students' interest and provides challenge appropriate to their differing starting points. For example, in a Year 10 geography lesson students tackled an interesting task about the impact of tourism in Kenya. The teacher set different levels of challenge for different students clearly linked to their target GCSE grades. As a result students enjoyed their learning and made good progress.

Where teaching is weaker, teachers' skills in identifying the next steps each student should take in their learning are underdeveloped. Tasks do not build well on previous learning or challenge students to develop their skills further or deepen their understanding. Attempts are made to set varied levels of challenge for students of different abilities but these are not well thought through. As a result, students make slow progress or produce work that is not as good as it could be.

The quality of marking is improving. Students now receive regular written comments about what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Where teachers do not understand or explain the next step, marking is less helpful. In some cases the judgement on the quality of the work is inaccurate. Students are rarely given time in lessons to respond to the comments. Nevertheless, students and parents and carers agree that teaching is getting better.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The amount of low-level disruption in lessons has reduced considerably. In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of behaviour and students respond well. They are cooperative and willing to engage with the task at hand. Students and parents and carers agree that behaviour has improved but are frustrated by the amount of low-level disruption that is still not dealt with well enough, particularly in lessons taught by cover staff or supply teachers. Students conduct themselves around the site in a calm and orderly manner. There are now very few incidents of bullying or fighting and students say they feel safe. The identification of different zones of the school site for different year groups at break and lunchtimes has helped. The introduction of 'safe texting' helps students to raise any concerns confidentially with a member of staff. It is not used very often but some students say they feel safer knowing that the option is there.

The rate of fixed-term exclusions is continuing to decline following the significant increase reported at the last visit in March. Exclusion rates are now at similar levels to those reported at the inspection in December but they are still too high. No students have been permanently excluded but several Year 7 students with particularly challenging behaviour have been moved to other schools. The school

plans to introduce more effective support for students with the most challenging behaviour are very necessary and need to be implemented urgently and rigorously to help students stay in the school, improve their behaviour and make progress in their learning.

Improvements in punctuality reported at the last visit have been sustained but attendance has dipped by 2% since last term. Further actions will be required if this trend continues.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

You and the head of school, together with your senior team, are working tirelessly and effectively to bring about rapid change. As a result of skilful leadership, teachers are now positive about the part they have to play in the school's improvement. They are keen to develop their skills and be as effective as possible. The school action plan now contains clear targets and milestones for improvements. Leaders are assiduously reviewing the effectiveness of actions and adjusting the plan when required.

Leaders at all levels are increasingly aware of strengths and what needs further improvement. Middle leaders have been trained to carry out lesson observations and scrutinise students' work. They are now checking the quality of teaching and the progress of students in their areas each term to identify issues that need attention. They report their findings to a panel meeting of senior leaders where next steps are agreed. An assistant headteacher scrutinises samples of students' work at least three times a week and gives feedback to subject leaders and whole staff meetings on what is working well and what needs to improve.

The school has acted swiftly to challenge and support those teachers whose practice needed to improve the most. In some instances this has resulted in teachers leaving. A further group of teachers whose teaching needs considerable improvement are being supported by senior leaders and expert practitioners from other schools. All teachers are set clear expectations for teaching and whole-staff training helps them meet these expectations. Not all teachers receive individual or personalised development opportunities to help them improve their practice.

The members of the newly formed governing body have relevant skills and experience. However, their first governing body meeting has not yet taken place and more needs to be done to establish the structures and processes that will enable an intense focus on improving the school.

External support

The Swale Academies Trust is providing the leadership and support needed to improve the school. The local authority has now established clear targets against which the trust is held to account. A local authority officer visits the school every fortnight to check progress and termly meetings are held with the Principal Adviser for secondary schools to review the impact of the trust's work.