

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 679 9161
Direct email: ann.morris@serco.com



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Mr Mike Smith
Principal
Queen Elizabeth's Academy
Chesterfield Road South
Mansfield
NG19 7AP

Dear Mr Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Queen Elizabeth's Academy

Following my visit with Alan Brewerton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1–2 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm my 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.

This was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Chief Executive of the Schools Partnership Trust Academies, the Chair of the Education Advisory Board, the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, the Chair of the Queen Elizabeth Trust and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate variations in students' achievement in English and mathematics by robustly improving the weakest teaching in these subjects.
- Improve the consistency of teaching so that all lessons secure at least good progress for all groups of students and encourage them to develop good attitudes to learning by:
 - making sure that all teachers use all the information they have about their students' previous learning to plan lessons and activities that will meet their needs
 - increasing the opportunities for students to think and find things out for themselves in lessons
 - giving students more chances to develop, apply and reinforce their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.
- Rapidly improve the attendance of all students across the academy, so that it is at least in line with the national average.
- Improve the achievement of those students in the sixth form who are undertaking academic qualifications and increase the opportunities all students have to develop their employability skills.
- Strengthen the capacity of leadership and management at all levels to sustain improvement by:
 - developing the skills of subject leaders so that they take full responsibility for improving the quality of teaching in their departments
 - strengthening the analysis of information about students' progress in English and mathematics to support leaders and governors in checking on how well different groups of students are doing across all year groups
 - making the quality of academy self-evaluation and planning more accurate and realistic, so that there is a much clearer picture of the actions and milestones required in order for the academy to be judged good by July 2015.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the academy. An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1–2 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed parts of 20 lessons in all year groups and, where possible, looked at the work students have produced over the last few months. They observed behaviour around the school site at break and lunch times, and the arrival and departure of students in the morning and evening. Inspectors met with several groups of students, both formally and informally, teachers, senior leaders, the Principal, the Executive Principal, the Chair of the Education Advisory Board (Governing Body) and the Academy Improvement Adviser. A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including policies, records of students' progress and the checks that leaders make on the quality of teaching. The views of eight teachers who wrote to inspectors were also considered.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in January, a Vice-Principal, two heads of department and a number of other staff have chosen to leave the academy. Three teachers are currently on long-term sick leave and there has been a relatively high level of other sickness absence. Some teachers have also taken strike action in recent weeks.

The governing body was replaced by an Education Advisory Board, and care has been taken to seek members of this board who have good educational experience. All but one place on this board has now been filled.

New members of the senior leadership team who had joined the school in January have now had the opportunity to establish themselves, and a Vice-Principal has been appointed from within the senior team.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Academy leaders have made a considerable investment in supporting students in Year 11 and in the sixth form to improve their GCSE and A-level examination results. They estimate that results will improve significantly in 2014 compared to 2013. The proportion of students who will achieve five or more GCSE passes at grade A* to C (including English and mathematics) is estimated to be 53% in 2014, compared to 34% last year. The proportion of students making expected progress from their starting points in Year 7 is expected to rise from 38% to 81% in English and from 52% to 66% in mathematics. Inspectors checked the methods used by the academy to make these estimates and believe that a suitable level of rigour has been applied. Improvements in results in the sixth form are modest, but consistent with the increased focus on improving teaching and learning.

The academy has worked very hard to support students eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals or in local authority care), and their results are also expected to improve significantly, although they are still likely to perform much less well than other students. Students who are disabled or who have special educational needs are also expected to perform much less well than those who are not. Although individuals often have good support, the academy does not monitor the overall progress of students with special education needs well enough to identify where they could make better progress. Similarly, the emphasis on achieving A* to C grades at GCSE and making expected progress has meant that the most-able students have not necessarily made the better progress that they should.

Much teaching since Easter this year has been affected by temporary arrangements covering absences and for other reasons. Whilst the teaching of Year 11 and the sixth form has, as far as possible, been protected, many students in other year groups have had a good number of lessons taught by temporary teachers. In many lessons observed by inspectors, students' attitudes to learning were not good and poor behaviour inhibited progress. Too many students do not take a pride in their work and standards of presentation are often poor. Many students have significant difficulties with reading and writing because of poor teaching in the past.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching in the academy is very variable. There is some excellent teaching, with teachers able to establish high standards of behaviour and enabling students to make good progress. Overall, however, expectations are far too low. The academy's predecessor school had a history of underachievement and some teachers, especially those who have continued from there, do not have an objective view about the true potential of the students. As a result, the overall level of challenge and aspiration for students is unambitious, much work does not promote good progress, and neither students nor staff believe that better outcomes are possible. This lack of ambition on the part of teachers is masked by their very strong loyalty to the school and community, and their genuine commitment to the care and well-being of students.

Where teachers have good relationships with students, use effective behaviour management strategies and plan a good range of learning activities that sustain pace and challenge, students make good progress and respond well. This was seen in a Year 7 English lesson based around Roald Dahl's *Leg of Lamb*. There was a strong work ethic in this class and students moved swiftly from writing on their own, to groups where they discussed who was the victim or villain of the story. Because the teacher set high standards in marking, the books were well cared for and progress was easy to follow. By contrast, in another Year 7 class, the books showed no evidence of developmental marking or high expectations. Very mediocre work had been stamped by the teacher as 'excellent' despite basic spelling, punctuation

and grammar errors not being addressed. These pupils took little care over their work and were making no discernable progress. Some teachers are highly skilled in asking questions that encourage students to think and deepen their understanding, but, in other classes observed, students were able to shout single word answers, which prevented others from becoming involved.

Many of the students spoken to described lessons that did not engage their interest. They enjoy learning and make good progress where teachers provide plenty of activity and make the subject matter interesting and relevant. They also complained that, sometimes, when temporary teachers taught them, these teachers did not know what the students had been learning or what they were to do in the lesson. Inspectors in one class taught by a supply teacher, saw mathematics books that had not been marked for some months. For some students, the inconsistency in teaching and the number of staff changes over the last term were a source of considerable insecurity. Some teaching for younger students is over-focused on testing and GCSE skills, missing opportunities to engage students in the interest and excitement of the subject.

Where marking is regular, it usually identifies errors and makes suggestions for how students can improve their work in future. It is rare, however, to see that students are acting on the advice by making corrections and improving their work. Where this does happen, it is very easy to see the improvement and progress that students make. Students say they appreciate it, and the time spent marking has greater value for the teacher.

New subject leadership in English has had a significant impact in improving teaching in this subject. Teachers are now sharing resources and teaching methods more effectively. Careful tracking of progress is used to target support for vulnerable groups, such as those eligible for the pupil premium funding. An English tutor is undertaking some highly effective work with these students and, in one Year 9 class observed, they were making much better progress than their peers. This is reflected in the projections for improved GCSE results this year in English.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students and staff expressed concerns about lessons where learning is disrupted by poor behaviour. Inspectors, who witnessed teachers being unable to teach effectively because of poor behaviour, confirmed this view. Most of this is low level, such as talking while the teacher is trying to speak, or spending time off task, but for most students it was the biggest complaint. The problems are worst where the teaching is poor and teachers are new to a class, but because students are becoming accustomed to an inconsistent application of the academy's behaviour policy, even experienced teachers with well-planned lessons report having difficulty on occasions. Students blamed teachers for not correctly identifying the students who were misbehaving and having boring lessons; many teachers blame school

leaders for not addressing the problem; and school leaders have been too quick to assume problems are only due to poor teaching. The truth is that there is not a sufficiently effective whole-school approach to the management of behaviour that supports learning under which students, teachers and leadership all recognise their own critical responsibilities to ensure that behaviour is consistently well managed.

The academy's reward system is working more effectively than at the time of the last visit, but some poor communication over the entitlement of students to participate in the forthcoming rewards trip to a local theme park has caused confusion and some anger amongst students. Students also expressed the same concerns as at the last visit, that some of the worst-behaved students had been offered lower targets and were given rewards more easily.

In other aspects of behaviour, students and the academy's recorded evidence indicate that there are fewer incidents of serious misbehaviour. The standards of students' uniform are creditably high: most wear it correctly and look smart. This contributes to the strong affinity that most students feel for the academy. Behaviour observed by inspectors around the site was generally orderly and safe, although students' use of inappropriate and offensive language was too frequent. Many students do not find it easy to speak with inspectors and other unfamiliar adults, but they are polite and cooperative.

Attendance, which has been a concern, continues to improve. Leaders have taken firm action to ensure that students are in school as much as possible. The academy has employed its own attendance and family liaison officer, and absent students are quickly followed up with telephone calls to parents and, where necessary, a visit to their homes. Overall attendance has improved from 91.2% in July last year to 93.3% at the time of this inspection. The proportion of students with absence levels that seriously damage their learning has reduced from 15% last year to 9.5% this year. Despite this, attendance is still worse than in most schools and is particularly poor for students eligible for the pupil premium and students who have special educational needs. A rigorous focus on punctuality in the morning ensures that the vast majority of students arrive in good time for their lessons.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The academy has made significant progress in developing leadership and management. The Principal has sustained a strong focus on raising standards in the academy. New members of the senior team have now been in post for long enough to be able to have some impact and provide support that is more significant. Those responsible for governance are receiving much better information about the performance of the academy.

Leaders' evaluation of the quality of the academy's work is now much more accurate than at the previous inspection. Some effective work has been done on bringing

together evidence from different sources, including the views of students and progress data, to judge the quality of teaching over time. There is still some way to go before this provides a truly accurate picture of students' typical daily experience, but it is much improved. The tracking of the progress that students make in their subjects is also much more effective than previously. The way that current achievement is measured against students' targets, however, does not help the early identification of those who are falling behind or those whose targets can be revised upwards in the light of good progress.

Impact of improved leadership is clear in the significant improvement in expected GCSE and sixth form examination scores, and also in the improved attendance at the academy. Some teachers spoken with were very positive about the improvement in collaboration within their subject department following a change in leadership, and said how much this was supporting and improving their teaching. There remains, however, a significant group of the teaching staff who are unconvinced about the changes and improvements asked for by the Principal and senior team. There is additional anxiety amongst staff about a restructure that is currently underway. This is reflected in both the letters written to inspectors and the recent strike action. In writing to inspectors, some of the concerns raised by staff are based on an unrealistic view of the current professional standards required of teachers; for example, the belief that it should be possible to fit all marking, preparation and assessment into timetabled non-contact (PPA) time. The biggest concern, however, was about the quality of communication between senior leaders and teaching staff.

Changes are currently being made to the sixth form curriculum in the light of previous success rates. Less successful courses have been discontinued and arrangements made through the Mansfield sixth-form partnership for these courses to be available elsewhere. In future, the academy will focus more strongly on vocational programmes, post-16, which have a strong success rate and have been particularly effective in supporting the progression of students who need additional support and guidance.

External support

The sponsor, the Schools Partnership Trust, has provided an appropriate level of support to the academy. This has taken the form of an Executive Principal who regularly visits the academy, an academy improvement adviser and the reshaping of the former governing body into the Education Advisory Body (EAB). Additional resources have also been made available, which have included the secondment of the Vice-Principal, deployment of English and mathematics specialists, and support for the leadership of sixth form and for timetabling. A member of the Trust core team has also been seconded to provide leadership support for the restructuring. The EAB now has a good range of expertise and has an extremely experienced Chair. The Trust and the EAB have, however, not taken full advantage of the flexibility available to them as an academy to adapt governance arrangements to

reduce the time that senior leaders spend on providing information and support. Thus, while the Trust board retains responsibility for finance, the EAB also discusses aspects of finance. Similarly, reports about the academy's performance are provided to both the Trust and the EAB, and both bodies question and challenge leaders about them. There is, therefore, some duplication, which places an additional time demand upon the academy's senior leaders.