

Tribal
Kings Orchard
1 Queens Street
Bristol, BS2 0HQ

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



7 November 2014

Mr J Whitcombe
The 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 Janice Williams, Additional Inspector, and Ann Short, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 November 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 third 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 school may 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 November 2014

Evidence

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

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the new governing body has been formed, different timings for the school day have been introduced, and students in Key Stages 3 and 4 have been grouped into two communities. Nineteen teachers, including a new head of science, have joined the school and 18 have left.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' examination results in 2014 were an improvement on last year. The percentage of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is much nearer the national average than previously. Achievement in English language improved dramatically and is now comparable with the national average. Leaders' swift actions to improve teaching and provide intensive support for Year 11, in preparation for their examinations, have had a clear impact. However, achievement in mathematics remained low. Students in Years 10 and 11 will need to make much more rapid progress in mathematics if achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 is to improve as needed. Students' progress in science is also a concern. More encouragingly, the proportions of students making expected and more than expected progress in mathematics in Key Stage 3 are higher than at Key Stage 4. Leaders are increasingly confident that information about student progress is accurate. They have adjusted assessment methods to help this. However, GCSE results in some subjects, including science, were considerably lower than predicted. Leaders are challenging these departments to improve the accuracy of their predictions.

Disadvantaged students did considerably less well than their peers in last summer's Year 11 examinations. However, the gap in achievement of these students compared with others is starting to close, most noticeably in Key Stage 3. The gap in achievement between students with special educational needs and others is not closing so well. Leaders are now carefully tracking the progress of all these students and arranging appropriate support to help them catch up. This includes the setting up of a nurture group for the Years 7 and 8 students who need the most support. Leaders have appropriately redefined the role of support staff to enable them to focus more effectively on improving learning.

Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve students' literacy skills. A teacher now takes responsibility for leading improvements in literacy in each subject area

and a reading programme has been introduced for Years 7 and 8 students. Teachers are typically using techniques for developing literacy more effectively than previously, but it is too soon to see the impact of these actions.

The quality of teaching

Leaders have upheld the improvements in teaching reported at the last visit and some aspects of teaching have improved further. Almost all teachers now have higher expectations of students. Teachers' marking is increasingly helpful in identifying what students do well and what they need to improve. Some teachers now give students lesson time to improve their work, in response to marking. However, teachers' skills in planning and teaching lessons that enable students to make rapid gains in skills and knowledge are not typically well developed. Leaders expect teachers to set three levels of challenge in all lessons, to meet the needs of students of different abilities. Teachers now consistently meet this expectation and each level of challenge now builds on the previous one. But the work set is often not demanding enough for more able students and sometimes is too easy for the whole class. Teachers are not routinely adjusting their lessons to take account of what students have learnt in the previous lesson. Sometimes students start a new topic when work in their books shows they have not mastered the previous one. At other times, marking shows that students are finding work easy, but they are not pushed to work at a higher level.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In many lessons teachers continue to have high expectations of behaviour and students respond well. However, in some lessons teachers are not tackling low-level disruption effectively and this remains a concern for students. Students typically conduct themselves well around the site, but there are times when conduct is not as good. This is usually when teachers or other staff are not nearby. The rate of fixed-term exclusions has continued to decline from a peak in April 2014, but is still higher than the national figure. A new behaviour support centre is now in place. It provides intensive support for students with challenging behaviour to help them improve. It is too soon to judge its effectiveness.

Students say they continue to feel safe at school. Bullying is rare, but teachers do not always challenge students when they use discriminatory language, such as calling other students 'gay'. Leaders must make sure students understand that discriminatory language is not acceptable and that teachers always challenge it.

Attendance overall has improved since the summer and is now near the national level, but the number of students with poor attendance is still too high.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher, head of school and senior team have an unrelenting focus on raising achievement and improving teaching. The approaches set up

previously, and the more recent changes, mean they are now well placed to bring about significant further improvement.

Leaders continue to check the quality of teaching and the progress of students assiduously to identify issues that need attention. During the visit, senior leaders showed skill in accurately judging the strengths and areas for development in the teaching they observed and agreed with inspectors' findings. Information they collect from regular book scrutiny confirms there is still much variability in the impact teaching has on student progress. However, some leaders, and in particular subject leaders, underestimate the amount by which teaching still needs to improve. Reports from regular reviews of teaching contribute to this view because they emphasise the percentage of teachers who were judged to be good, requiring improvement or inadequate on the day of the review and do not take into account well enough the considerable variability in teaching over time. Leaders should consider if the current way of reporting on the quality of teaching is helping the school move forward.

There is now a comprehensive range of individualised training and support available for all teachers to help them improve, including for those whose practice is already strong. Additionally, subject leaders are increasingly providing training and support for their teams. However, their skill in identifying the improvement needed and bringing these about needs further development. This is particularly the case in mathematics and science where teaching is typically not good enough to help students make the rapid progress they need to catch up.

The new governing body is now well placed to effectively hold leaders to account. Governors each have specific areas of responsibility and meet regularly with the senior leader for that area of work. Governors report on their findings at meetings of the full governing body, which are held every two months. They also attend the panel meetings where subject leaders report developments in their departments. Governors visit the school regularly to gain a deeper understanding of strengths and areas for development, and new governors have brought necessary skills including educational expertise. However, care is needed to make sure they maintain their strategic role and do not involve themselves in the day-to-day leadership and management of the school.

External support

The Swale Academies Trust is continuing to provide the leadership and support needed to improve the school. A local authority officer visits the school regularly to check progress and meets with the principal adviser for secondary schools to review the impact of the trust's work. As a result, the local authority has a clear understanding of the impact of the work of senior leaders and where further challenge and action are needed.