

Tribal
Kings Orchard, One Queen
Street, Bristol
BS2 0HQ

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

Direct T 0117 311 5323
Direct email: suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com



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Dr Rory Fox
Headteacher
Ryde Academy
Pell Lane
Ryde
PO33 3LN

Dear Dr Fox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ryde Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2015 and the subsequent visit from senior HMI Michael Sheridan and the regional director Sir Robin Boshier, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and sponsors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure all leaders and teachers understand their role in driving improvements in teaching and achievement and have the capacity to identify improvements in classrooms and around the school
- strengthen the impact of the academy sponsor by ensuring they contribute more effectively to improvements in the school
- strengthen the plans to improve the academy by:
 - ensuring the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection are referred to explicitly within your action plans
 - setting out clearly the detailed ways which leaders and others can evaluate the impact of actions taken by what they see when observing in lessons and around school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior team, a group of middle leaders, your head of inclusion, the Chair of Governors and the Regional Director of the Academy Trust. I spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. I met a group of students from the school council. I walked around the school with you to see the classes preparing for and taking school examinations. I evaluated the school development plan and looked at other key documents.

Context

Since the last inspection 16 teachers left the academy, including one member of the senior leadership team, three middle leaders and a temporary member of the senior leadership team. Two members of the senior leadership team are on long-term absence. Twelve teachers have joined the academy, including a science, technology, engineering and mathematics consultant who is leading the mathematics department.

Main findings

As Principal, you show clear ambition and a drive to raise standards. You have acted decisively to tackle poor subject leadership. Your focus has rightly been on restructuring the senior and middle leadership teams. You have also actively recruited new teachers to the academy and are supporting teachers within the academy to take on new roles and responsibilities. For example, your newly appointed head of English was developed into her role through coaching by one of your senior leaders. Other middle leaders new to their roles are positive about the guidance they receive from another senior leader.

It is clear from talking to you, your senior leaders and governors that the findings of the recent full inspection were not a surprise. You had already accurately identified most the school's weaknesses and started to tackle them. The one area which was unexpected was the need to improve strategies to track and monitor the progress of students in the care of the local authority. Systems are now in place to track and monitor these students and information about their needs is shared with teachers. It is important that you make sure this information is being used purposefully by all teachers in lessons so these students make the progress you expect them to make. Plans for the use of pupil premium funding (additional government funds for pupils in receipt of free school meals and those on the care of the local authority), do not show how the actions taking place are expected to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students.

Although the school improvement plan has been revised, it does not set out clearly enough the actions necessary to drive improvement in the areas for improvement identified at your recent section 5 inspection. It is clear from talking to you that you

have an understanding of how your strategic plan influences your departmental plans and individual staff development plans. However, I am not convinced that all members of staff, including some on your leadership team, have the same clarity about these links. Some do not talk convincingly enough about their responsibility for delivering desired improvements.

Improvement activities are planned, but your plans do not spell out how these activities are expected to improve students' experiences and learning. You have set targets for students' attainment and you test students periodically to see if they are on track to meet these targets. While this helps leaders and governors to measure the impact of actions at particular points, it does not give information to middle leaders regularly enough for them to adapt and lead improvements effectively in their areas. I am concerned that some of your leadership team cannot talk convincingly about the improvements they see day-to-day in classrooms and around the school. This level of watchfulness by middle leaders, along with subsequent feedback and professional development, will be essential in helping teachers to become more effective.

During the autumn term you trialled a new marking and feedback policy and all teachers have started to use this since the beginning of January. Students reported that they were finding the feedback helpful, but it is too soon to show impact on their progress. Some leaders spoken to during the monitoring inspection were not clear about how they were going to measure the difference the marking policy will make to improving students' work.

You have rightly identified the importance of being sure that assessments of students' work are accurate. Subject leaders and teachers have been given time to check and compare students' work in order to ensure that their assessments are valid and consistent and leaders are now more confident that teachers are assessing accurately.

At the beginning of January, there was whole school training on the use of the academy's behaviour management policy. You have improved the systems for checking how well teachers are using this policy. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these actions on the behaviour of students during lessons. The students I met told me that some teachers were still not applying the policy consistently.

Elections have taken place for a new student council. The student council representatives are feeling very positive about their new roles and are excited about the part they hope to play in the future development of the academy.

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 academy trust has not provided the school with enough targeted support. Following the section 5 inspection, the Trust did not act with sufficient urgency to ensure that plans to improve the school focused sharply on the areas for improvement. However, since the beginning of January the new Regional Director is working to develop a closer relationship with leaders in the school, in order to increase the pace of improvement. The local authority has commissioned Hampshire local authority to provide support for the academy. They have responded to requests from the Principal and have provided useful training for staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector