

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 5359
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com



27 February 2015

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 James Waite, Additional inspector, and Hugh Betterton, Additional inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 February 2015, 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 fourth 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 before the next monitoring inspection.

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, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Education Funding Agency.

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 it
 - 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and the head of school, a member 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. A telephone discussion took place with the vice chair of governors.

Context

A new executive headteacher has been appointed to the Swale Academies Trust. He will fulfil this role for the school from April 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Improved teaching and helpful support are enabling students to achieve increasingly well. The proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 on track to make expected progress in mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4 is much nearer to the national average than previously. Key Stage 3 students are typically on track to make good progress in mathematics. Students throughout the school continue to achieve well in English and now make good progress in most other subjects. However, students' achievement in science remains low in Years 11 and 9 and the proportion of Year 10 students who have made strong progress over time is low in English and very low in science and mathematics. Teaching is not consistently effective in helping students catch up from previous underachievement and make further progress, particularly in science.

Disadvantaged students are typically achieving more than previously. In English there is now no gap between their achievement and that of other students in the school or nationally. Disadvantaged students in Years 7 and 8 are also achieving well in mathematics and science. Gaps in achievement are closing in other year groups. Nevertheless, disadvantaged students in Years 10 and 11 are still doing notably less well than their peers and other students nationally. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are now typically making good progress in English. Increasingly they are making good progress in mathematics too. However, the proportion of these students on track to make at least expected progress in mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4 is still low in some year groups.

Students' literacy skills are improving. As a result they are able to make better progress in other subjects than previously. Extra support for students in Key Stage 3 has been particularly effective. In September 2014 most Year 9 students had low reading ages. Now almost half of them have a reading age that at least matches

their actual age. Years 7 and 8 students' reading and spelling ages have also risen significantly.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the last visit. Teachers typically set work with the right challenge for students of varying abilities. Students engage with the tasks and learn well. Where teaching is most effective teachers skilfully present and explore ideas with the class. They engage students in discussions that encourage inquisitiveness and draw well on existing knowledge and skills. Students have very positive relationships with their teachers and are eager to learn. However, a significant minority of teachers are still not setting tasks that consistently challenge students of varying abilities, and particularly the more able, to learn well. In some instances teachers' expectations for what students can achieve in a lesson are not high enough. In these lessons students are required to spend time on basic or mundane tasks that do not engage their interest. Opportunities for new learning are limited. As a result, progress is slow.

Teachers' marking provides students with regular feedback on how well they are doing and what needs improvement. However, students often do not make good use of this information. They usually know what grade they are working at and what their target is, but often do not take responsibility for their learning. Students often struggle to explain what they need to improve on without referring back to specific comments teachers have written. They will usually make improvements if the teacher asks them to, but do not generally take the initiative themselves. Where teaching is strongest, this is not the case. Students improve their work in response to teachers' written feedback. Students also track their own progress. They identify what they need to do next to help them improve and act on it.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students usually behave well in lessons and engage in the task at hand. This is because teachers plan lessons that engage students' interest and set clear expectations for behaviour. Where teaching is the most effective, students are starting to display real enthusiasm and interest in their learning. In lessons where teaching is less effective students are, at best, compliant. At times low-level disruption is evident. Students' behaviour around the school is mainly orderly and calm, but when staff are not nearby, students sometimes still behave boisterously. Students who have challenging behaviour are now receiving helpful support through the behaviour support centre. Support for their personal and social development, together with opportunities to engage in activities such as fishing and cooking, helps students become more positive about themselves and their learning. As a result, several students have improved their behaviour significantly.

The schools' work to keep students safe is sound and students report that they feel safe around the site. Since the last visit, leaders have taken effective action to tackle discriminatory language and specifically 'gay' name calling. This included awareness raising assemblies, consultation with students and letters to parents and carers. Students told inspectors they were now confident that teachers would deal swiftly with any discriminatory behaviour.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher, head of school and senior team continue to provide strong and effective leadership. Their relentless focus on improving teaching and raising achievement is enabling continued improvement. Leaders have an increasingly accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and where improvement is needed. Teachers who do not teach consistently well are receiving suitable further support including coaching and opportunities to observe and learn from stronger practitioners in the school. Leaders have rightly identified teaching in science as an area for specific attention. External consultants have recently started working with science leaders and teachers to address this. All subject leaders have received further training on judging teaching quality and have been given more time to run training with their teams. Suitable team training plans are now in place that identify the areas of teaching which need improvement and the subject-specific training that will take place to address these. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this approach.

Leaders across the school take care to evaluate the effectiveness of new initiatives they introduce. They know the starting point for each piece of work they lead and make good use of data to evaluate the impact of their actions.

The governing body continues to hold the school effectively to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Governors have a well-developed understanding of how well different student groups achieve in all subjects and years. They challenge leaders robustly when needed and make sure they are satisfied that appropriate actions are being taken. However, the governing body has not considered in any depth how effective the school is in promoting students' spiritual, social, cultural and moral development. Neither has it considered whether the school is effectively promoting tolerance and respect and preparing students for life in modern Britain. Governors and leaders recognise this is an important next step in their work.

External support

The Swale Academies Trust continues to provide effective leadership and support. It has made sure it continues to have the capacity to do this. As the Principal of the Trust can no longer provide the day-to-day support necessary to the school, a new executive head has been appointed who will provide this support from April. A local

authority officer continues to visit the school regularly to conduct reviews of the school's progress. He provides effective challenge and support, which is valued by the school's leadership.