

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 01173115246
Direct F 01173150430
Direct email: Sara.Whalley@Tribalgroup.com



27 April 2015

Miss Shena Moynihan
Headteacher
Highcrest Academy
Hatters Lane
High Wycombe
HP13 7NQ

Dear Miss Moynihan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Highcrest Academy

Following my visit to your school on 27 April 2015, 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- strengthen its self-evaluation, by removing unnecessary historic details and adding information about successful aspects of its work. For example, it should make more explicit the positive impact careful use of the pupil premium (additional government funding) has had on the progress of eligible pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with representatives of the governing body who are directors of the academy trust and a representative of the local authority. You led me on a tour of the academy and I observed students at lunchtime whilst undertaking a second tour of the site. Many students spoke with me informally about the academy. I reviewed your current self-evaluation document, your raising attainment plans and a range of other academy documents. We looked together at examples of senior leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning and the current training programme.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection one of the vice principals has retired. A new vice principal joined the school in April 2015. Two members of staff have joined the leadership team to strengthen it. About ten members of staff have left the academy but all have been replaced.

Main findings

You have continued to address rigorously the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have also re-considered effectively the academy's self-evaluation as suggested during the last monitoring inspection. The document is now succinct, coherent and rightly focused on necessary improvements. However, the document does not cover all the academy's work. It does not show, for example, the impact careful use of the pupil premium has had on the progress of eligible students. It does not report at all the effectiveness of actions taken to improve students' behaviour in the academy. The self-evaluation document does not report fully the success the academy has had in reducing exclusions or raising attendance. The document contains some information about the academy prior to the last inspection. It talks about awards that are no longer relevant and yet ignores substantial successes such as the impressive staff training programme.

You have ensured with other senior leaders that necessary improvements to teaching have continued. You check regularly on the quality of teaching through termly observations. You check this by looking thoroughly at the quality of work in students' books or folders. Along with other leaders you hold teachers to account robustly for the results of a sample of their classes. As a result you have an increasingly full understanding of the quality of teaching in the academy. You know where weaknesses still exist and you have taken appropriate action to change this. Senior leaders are also aware of the many strengths in the academy. The training programme has been purposely arranged to enable good or interesting practice to be shared widely across the academy. Since the training is judged by staff to be useful, the vast majority engage with it. Consequently practice is improving steadily.

You have strengthened your leadership team since the last monitoring inspection. The new appointments have added significantly to existing expertise. They have also contributed to improved standards across the academy. Strengths include the consistent use by all teachers of a single, standard lesson planning form, the secure use of a simple assessment tool by all teachers and the consistent challenge to all classes to follow the thoughtful and well-rehearsed routines in classrooms. Students understand clearly what is expected of them. They now know how to behave well and rarely disrupt each other's learning. This improved behaviour has resulted in far fewer students being excluded or being required to spend time in the inclusion unit. Those that find themselves there understand why this action has been necessary.

Students also understand the importance of the simple and smart uniform. They like it. They are proud of it, as they are of the academy as a whole. One student told me she was pleased to have joined the academy for her sixth form studies. She said this was because it gave her the chance to study qualifications better suited to her career plans than were available elsewhere. Parent governors also reported how well the academy prepared their children for the next stage of their life or education. As well as the academic successes of the academy, parents indicate their increasing satisfaction with the way in which it contributes to each student's personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Students' achievement continues to rise. You took the tough decision to withdraw some courses where standards were not good enough. You have recruited new teachers able to deliver courses that are better suited to the needs of some students in the sixth form. You are steadily building a unique group of subjects which are of benefit to Highcrest students. This means that your recruitment into the sixth form is also improving. Students are now on courses which meet their needs and as a result achievement in the sixth form is rising. In Key Stage 4 achievement is also improving. Senior leaders are relentless in ensuring that students make expected levels of progress in each of their subjects. Growing numbers are exceeding expected levels of progress and, in Year 11, many are on track to attain good results in the summer of 2015. Teachers' forecasts for examination results were accurate in the last two years. Current information about achievement suggests much better performance than in 2014. You estimate that the proportion of students achieving five A*-C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics will be above the national average set in 2014. The information provided supports such estimates.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy benefits from a good relationship with members of the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. It also receives well-focused support from an external consultant who advises the governors on the Principal's performance management. The academy makes a significant contribution to a local teacher

training partnership. Experience gained from that work is shared effectively within the academy and this contributes to further improvements to teaching over time.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector