

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 01173115246  
**Direct F** 01173150430  
Sara.Whalley@Tribalgroup.com

7 May 2015

Ms Siobhan Denning  
Headteacher  
The Forest School  
Comptons Lane  
Horsham  
RH13 5NW

Dear Ms Denning

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Forest School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) at the school.

### **Evidence**

I met with you, other senior staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, a local authority representative and two groups of students. I was shown around the school by students. I visited some lessons and groups of students at work, including the Year 7 nurture group. I evaluated documentation; this included data about the progress and attendance of students entitled to pupil premium funding, the school's self-evaluations and the school improvement plan.

### **Context**

This is a secondary school, of just above average size, for boys. There are 139 students entitled to pupil premium funding out of a total student population of 1057. This proportion is below average but the number of students concerned is significant.

The school's head of history was appointed as pupil premium leader in January 2015. Just before this, you established a pupil premium strategic group, principally comprised of senior leaders. This group considers approaches and holds the pupil premium leader to account for his work. These changes followed a local authority conference about the pupil premium in the autumn of 2014.

You have a clear, strong philosophy about the way the school supports disadvantaged students. This is closely shared by staff and governors. You focus on meeting individual needs in a very compassionate way, whilst seeking to ensure that students entitled to pupil premium funding are not isolated or unhelpfully identified. You see this as particularly important as the school serves an area of relative affluence.

The school's approach has clear and important benefits. Many students entitled to the support of pupil premium funding can point to caring work by staff which has helped them immensely. This includes, for example, successful and very sensitive work with them and their families to improve attendance, wellbeing, achievement or behaviour. One student summed this up when he said that the school had enabled him to 'feel safe in the hardest of times'.

The school's pupil premium funding is appropriately spent on items including staffing for nurture groups and specific interventions, purchase of items of uniform and equipment, provision of homework facilities and funding of activities outside of lessons designed to raise aspiration. However, the school's summary financial reports do not yet show the pupil premium expenditure under each budget heading. This makes it harder to evaluate precisely the success of the spending.

The monitoring of pupil premium spending has had a low profile. It is only in the past few months that this has begun to be raised, following the local authority conference. This means that although pupil premium funding is properly used, its impact on outcomes for students is not yet robustly checked and evaluated. The school cannot fully identify the value or impact of pupil premium funded interventions. The targets in the school improvement plan related to the expected impact of pupil premium expenditure are insufficiently precise and are not readily measurable.

The school nevertheless has some very positive information. For example, no students left the school last year without having future education, employment or training arranged. The students' destinations are diverse, indicating that the school provides a suitable curriculum and guidance catering for a wide range of needs.

The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and that of their classmates is wide. For example, the progress of students in 2014 from Key Stages 2 to 4 was significantly below the national average for students entitled to free school meals but about average for other students. A much lower than average proportion of students entitled to free school meals attained five good GCSEs including English and mathematics. However, students entitled to pupil premium funding made sound

progress in English, mathematics and science. Your expectation, based on current tracking data, is that the gaps identified should reduce this year in an improving overall picture.

The fixed-term exclusion rate for students entitled to the pupil premium funding is higher than average. Their attendance rate is below average over time. Senior staff and governors need to ask increasingly robust questions about these matters. The school's self-evaluation of pupil premium expenditure does not adequately reflect these key points.

The new pupil premium leader is beginning to do useful work. After completing an audit of provision, he now provides useful individualised records for all relevant students, which are helpful to staff. Governors are committed to the wellbeing of disadvantaged students, with the Chair now taking the lead. These are positive developments but it is too early to say what their impact is, or how effective specific current provision or interventions are.

### **External support**

The local authority facilitated the 2014 conference which has led to the school beginning to improve its procedures relating to pupil premium. As the school was judged to be good at its last inspection in November 2012, it does not receive a very high level of support. As part of its general monitoring, however, the local authority asks questions of the school about the outcomes for disadvantaged students. The local authority has agreed that its officer leading on the pupil premium will contact the school to consider any future support.

### **The strengths in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- the clear leadership aimed at ensuring that, in an area of relative advantage, many needs of disadvantaged students are sensitively met
- the academic and social needs of students are well known to staff
- the expectations of students entitled to pupil premium support are suitably high
- within subject departments, and the school's four pastoral communities, pupil premium funding is used to meet known individual needs
- no students left the school in 2014 without going on to further education, training or employment.

**The weaknesses in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- the school does not meet the requirement to publish information on its website information about the impact of pupil premium expenditure
- the school improvement plan targets related to students entitled to pupil premium lack precision and are therefore hard to measure
- the school does not yet analyse robustly enough how well students entitled to pupil premium funding fare academically, or how their social needs are met.
- although this figure is reducing, a much higher proportion of students entitled to pupil premium funding have received temporary exclusions than the national average. Disadvantaged students also attend less well than their counterparts nationally.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure the school improvement plan contains ambitious, precise and measurable targets, whether based on soft or hard data, for students entitled to pupil premium funding.
- Use the monitoring and evaluation of these parts of the school improvement plan to make sharper, more coherent self-evaluations of the impact of pupil premium funding.
- Consider whether and how pupil premium funding might be used to reduce further the rate of exclusion or to raise attendance.
- Clearly show pupil premium expenditure in summary financial reports, so its uses are clearer to governors and staff.
- Publish the required information about the use of the pupil premium on the school's website.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**