

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

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

Direct T 0121 679 9154
Direct email: aidan.dunne@serco.com



11 June 2015

Elizabeth Robinson
Headteacher
Tabor Academy
Panfield Lane
Braintree
CM7 5XP

Dear Mrs Robinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Tabor Academy

Following my visit with Ian Middleton, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Richard Spencer, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9–10 June 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures in November 2014. 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

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 Interim Executive Board, the Chief Executive of the Loxford Trust and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State
- The lead and team inspectors.

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and raise standards across the academy by making sure that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of all groups of students, and that these expectations are translated into effective classroom practice
 - planned teaching activities lead to rapid progress
 - advice to students on how to improve their work is clear and they are given the opportunity to act on it
 - all teachers provide for the needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs
 - teachers are aware of the needs of disadvantaged students in their classes and of the extra resources that are available to support them.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - reducing the excessive changes of teacher that lead to poor experiences for students
 - ensuring that the assessment of students' progress is accurate and is used effectively to aid teaching
 - making sure that policies on marking, literacy, numeracy and behaviour management are clear to all staff and that they are applied consistently across the academy
 - improving communication with parents so that they have confidence in the leadership of the academy.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9–10 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work; visited lessons, many jointly with members of the academy's middle and senior leaders; and evaluated learning in students' books. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents including: the academy's monitoring of its own work; students' progress and attendance data; records of meetings; behaviour logs; and the single central record. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, groups of students, parents, the chief executive of the Trust, the Chair and one other member of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit on 24 February 2015, there have been substantial changes to the leadership and governance of the academy. Sponsorship of the academy transferred to the Loxford Trust on 1 April 2015, when a new headteacher also started. In addition, a new deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have recently joined the academy. The previously acting head of mathematics has taken up the post on a permanent basis. In addition, the interim executive board was re-formed and first met on 8 May 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The standards students attain at the academy remain low in comparison to their peers nationally. Students are not making the progress required to catch up. This includes different groups of students, including the most able and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Disadvantaged students are still making slower progress than other students at the academy. Students' progress data and the evidence seen in lessons and books indicate that progress is inconsistent within and between subjects. Better achievement in subjects such as history, modern foreign languages and physical education shows what the students are capable of. However, across a range of subjects, students are not developing a strong enough foundation of skills and knowledge in Key Stage 3. For example, although a group of Year 7 students with special educational needs enjoyed their mathematics and worked hard, they found the task too easy because it repeated work they had done in primary school.

Recent initiatives, such as additional classes for examination groups, are starting to have a positive impact, particularly in English. However, the proportion of students on course to attain five or more A* to C GCSE grades including both English and mathematics is significantly below national averages, as it was in 2014. Leaders' more-ambitious targets for students better reflect the progress they should be expected to make. However, this is not reflected in classrooms, where targets are

sometimes lower than the standard of students' current work. Stronger progress is evident in subjects where lesson planning takes better account of students' starting points in order to pitch challenge and structure support. For example, in history, the most-able Year 10 students attain higher grades because they are taught how to develop the skills required to tackle complex sources. In these lessons, the opportunity for students to see examples of high-quality work inspires them to do well.

The quality of teaching

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain. Academy leaders acknowledge that the work that is being carried out to improve the quality of teaching is too recent to have had a significant impact. Evidence gathered during this monitoring inspection confirms this to be the case. However, most teachers have secure subject knowledge and support academy leaders' plans to improve the quality of teaching.

Teachers are not using assessment information skilfully enough to plan lessons or sequences of lessons that cater fully for the range of students' abilities and individual learning needs in the class. This includes classes that have been grouped by ability. For example, the same resources are often used or the same questions asked across all ability groups without sufficient modification. Similarly, teachers' marking is not always detailed or specific enough to aid students' responses. Where more-constructive marking is leading to improved work, teachers make time for students to review and modify their work. However, although examples of effective marking are evident in subjects such as science and mathematics, the best practice is not used by all teachers in these subjects. The expectation that all teachers should provide opportunities for students to improve upon their work in lessons is only a recent change to the academy's teaching and learning policy. However, there are signs that students are beginning to make improvements to their work with greater confidence and care.

Behaviour and safety of students

Academy leaders have taken swift and decisive action to deal with unacceptable behaviour and this is leading to an improvement in behaviour in lessons and around the academy site. Staff, students and parents express confidence in the systems recently put in place to arrest the decline in behaviour they reported. Leaders' expectations that students and staff should be 'In the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing' is clearly understood. Almost all students move purposefully to lessons and arrive on time. Where expectations of students are clear, most respond to routines responsibly, for example when organising themselves and others efficiently in physical education. However, not all students show that they are ready to show initiative or take responsibility when opportunities to make decisions are given.

Students show that they can settle quickly and contribute actively where the teaching interests and challenges them. In these lessons, their positive attitudes to learning grow. For example, students in a German lesson displayed an enthusiasm for their learning and spoke with confidence, making strong progress. This high level of personal development is inconsistent within and between subjects and year groups because it is dependent upon the quality of teaching. Evidence seen in lessons demonstrated that, where the teaching is less effective, students quickly lose focus and engage in low-level disruption that hampers their progress.

While students report that they are happier in school and that behaviour has improved since April, they also know that it is not good enough. Students told inspectors that behaviour on the corridors leads to some of them feeling insecure. However, they value the higher profile and presence of adults at break and lunch times, and they hold the headteacher in high esteem. Although students are concerned that different types of bullying, including use of derogatory language, still exist, the students and parents who met with inspectors expressed confidence in school leaders to tackle such issues. Students also acknowledged the need for the academy to help them prepare more effectively for life in modern Britain; this is exemplified by their difficulty in identifying what democracy is.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since April 2015, leaders have taken swift and decisive action to bring about improvement, but their actions have not had sufficient time to demonstrate sustained impact. The high aspirations and strong determination of the headteacher and chief executive have established quickly a positive ethos and sharp improvement in the morale of staff, confidence of students and support of parents. In the words of one student, 'They are changing the things that need changing.'

The headteacher has a detailed understanding of what needs to happen to address the weaknesses in the academy. The senior team, strengthened by recent appointments, are now driving these improvements with enthusiasm and tenacity. The headteacher is acutely aware of the need to make improvements quickly, while ensuring that they are sustainable and embraced by all staff.

Significant changes have been made in a very short period of time; new job descriptions, a new management structure and new policies are examples. Plans are underway to reform the curriculum, and parents are being consulted about changes to the academy day. Leaders have moved skilfully and quickly to reduce the number of lessons that are regularly covered by temporary teachers. This is greatly appreciated by students, as well as by the parents who spoke to inspectors during the inspection. The way that leaders and teachers use data to set targets and monitor progress is changing, and higher targets have recently been set.

Middle leaders, such as subject and progress leaders, value their increasing involvement in decision making. They are using a range of information judiciously to inform plans to improve provision, although the expected impact on raising standards is not yet consistently clear. A current priority, to ensure that the curriculum for September 2015 is well matched to the abilities of students, and prepares them for life in modern Britain, is providing a focus for collaborative work between leaders.

Teachers value the strong sense of direction and they appreciate the training designed to improve the quality of students' education at the academy. They are better informed about academy policies, such as those for literacy and behaviour, although this training took place very recently and policies are not yet being consistently applied.

Members of the interim executive board are well informed, ambitious and know what needs to be done to improve the outcomes for students. They visit the academy regularly and are active in ensuring that the priorities and actions are precise and realistic.

External support

The Loxford Trust is providing academy leaders with much support. Senior members of the trust have ensured that leaders have developed a statement of action that is fit for purpose. This support includes the funding for an additional senior leader and the support of a finance officer. The trust is also providing support in the form of lead practitioners, who are already working with teachers across the academy to improve the quality of teaching. Middle leaders and teachers are highly appreciative of this support, but acknowledge that it is too early to see the impact of this work.

The local authority, which is represented on the interim executive board, is providing opportunities for the headteacher to establish links with local schools. This work is at an early stage.