

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Ruth Martin
Acting Headteacher
The Royal Docks Community School
Prince Regent Lane
Custom House
London
E16 3HS

Dear Ms Martin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Royal Docks Community School

Following my visit with Peter Clifton and Barry King, additional inspectors, to your school on 16 and 17 September 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Newham.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of The Royal Docks Community School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 16 – 17 September 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, the senior and middle leadership team, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the chair of the curriculum committee, representatives from the local authority, London Challenge and the school improvement partner.

Context

An executive headteacher has been appointed to work alongside the headteacher for the duration of the academic year. The senior leadership team restructuring has resulted in the appointment of two new deputy headteachers. The school is set to become a National Challenge Trust school in April 2010.

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

In line with the school's predictions for the standards reached at GCSE, the proportion of students obtaining five or more A* to C grades in 2009 demonstrated a marked improvement as compared to the previous year. Half of the students reached this mark. Similarly, over one third of students reached the five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics representing a 10% improvement from the 2008 results. In both cases the challenging targets set for this year group were met.

The variation in standards between subjects noted in the previous report, particularly between English, mathematics and science, has decreased as a result of improvement in the proportion of students achieving high grades at GCSE in English and science. The results in mathematics in 2009 are similar to those in 2008.

The reliability of school held data has improved. The 2009 information shows a much tighter comparison between the outcomes predicted for Year 11 students and those reached. This reflects the much improved target setting and tracking arrangements which have been introduced.

In Year 9, the school performance information shows a modest improvement from that in 2008. The improvement in the science outcomes is closing the gap that was evident in 2008; however English and mathematics remain the stronger areas.

In the previous report, inspectors found that in a significant proportion of lessons the students did not make sufficient progress in relation to their starting points. From the lessons observed during the monitoring visit, learning and progress have

improved with greater use of targets in lessons for example, through the use of work which has the level of difficulty identified. However, the use of targets to secure rapid improvement by all staff remains variable.

The overall improvement in standards from the results in 2009 has also led to an improvement in achievement. This improvement is reflected in the comments made by the students themselves who said that they are now expected to work considerably harder and take on more responsibility for their own learning.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and achievement by ensuring realistic but challenging targets are used effectively by all staff to secure rapid improvement – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

In 2008, the rate of student attendance fell on the previous two years to below the national average. The school has wide-ranging strategies in place which include rewards for students with good or much improved attendance. Monitoring of attendance is regular and actions to address poor attenders are supported by teachers. It is too early to assess the full impact of these measures.

The effectiveness of provision

The school's basic protocols for teaching, for example the use of a common pro forma for planning lessons, and the identification and sharing of learning outcomes, are well embedded. The precision of learning outcomes across the three levels of attainment vary; they are well formulated in many lessons but in a number of cases teachers confuse an outcome with an activity, or else specify an outcome too generally to allow an accurate assessment of progress at the end of the lesson.

Teachers have successfully created supportive learning environments in most classrooms, with good relationships and mutual respect very evident. This makes a major contribution to the extent to which students enjoy their lessons and are well behaved. Behaviour was at least good in the majority of lessons observed and was often outstanding. In the few lessons where behaviour was not good enough the cause was not mischief-making but over-excitement that was not managed effectively by the teachers.

Teachers demonstrate in almost all lessons a secure grasp of their subject matter and how students can progress from one level of attainment to another. In a number of lessons teachers made it very clear to students how they could improve their work.

Whiteboards are used effectively throughout the school. In several lessons teachers also made good use of computers to support students' research. Teaching assistants

and support teachers are in the main well deployed, securing the effective engagement in lessons of the targeted students.

The use of assessment in lessons is generally satisfactory. Teachers ask students a range of questions to probe understanding and usually refer at some point in lessons to success criteria to evaluate their work. In the best lessons, good use is made of peer assessment, which helps students to articulate what they need to do to improve, although in several lessons opportunities to do this are passed over. It was too early in the academic year for inspectors to evaluate how well marking contributes to students' progress, and this will be a focus on the next monitoring visit.

In a few lessons observed, the teaching strongly promoted students' speaking and listening skills. One example was in a physical education lesson where students made presentations and then evaluated each other's work using cards with clear assessment criteria. In another, students sat in a circle discussing moral issues, immensely enjoying the interchanges while developing a good understanding of the need to listen to others' points of view. However, opportunities for developing oral skills are often missed because teaching styles do not encourage sufficient student talk, whether in group work or plenary sessions.

Teachers hold a good range of data on students' prior learning and their future learning needs, and routinely identify the different learning outcomes and outline the ways in which certain students will be supported and others stretched. The success of these strategies is variable. While support for slower learners is often strong, through the use of support staff, there was much less evidence in the lessons observed of more challenge for the more-able students.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

Improve the quality of teaching and students' progress by ensuring teachers consistently:

- use a range of activities which challenge and motivate, and meet the needs of all students – satisfactory
- provide students with clear information on how well they are achieving and what they need to improve – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has worked well to stabilise the school's financial and staffing position and to implement effective monitoring arrangements to reduce the school's budget deficit. The rise in students' standards is predominately due to the much improved whole school procedures to assess and improve student performance.

The revised senior leadership structure has resulted in clear lines of accountability which has enabled the school to monitor its performance more effectively. Senior

leaders understand their role in driving through school improvement and are doing so swiftly, in the main due to the close scrutiny of the work of department heads and other middle leaders. The school's evaluation is broadly accurate and is used well by leaders and managers.

The school's data show that leaders are developing a secure understanding about the progress of different groups of students. They have rightly identified that in Year 11, students of White British origin did not do as well as other students. More rapid actions to identify student underperformance, especially for Year 11 students, are also now in place. These actions are currently cascading down to lower year groups.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the overall quality of teaching and learning, including the areas for development of individual staff. The overall profile of lesson grades seen by these leaders is similar to those of inspectors on this monitoring visit. Senior leaders and middle managers have an extensive programme of lesson observation through in-depth subject reviews and briefer informal observations. Lesson observations are carefully recorded and make clear where the strengths and weaknesses lie. Through a programme of targeted coaching and general in-service training opportunities, the school has built on lesson observations to ensure that general protocols are firmly embedded; such as the way in which lessons are planned. Senior leaders are aware that, while there is very good practice in the school, their main task is to develop the confidence of all staff to use teaching styles that allow students to learn more independently.

The governing body has improved its challenge to many aspects of the school's work. More effective monitoring arrangements of the school's budgetary position are now in place and the reorganisation of roles within the governing body has resulted in a governor with relevant finance experience being appointed to chair the finance committee. Further governor training is planned to take place in the next few weeks.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve the quality and impact of monitoring and evaluation and improvement planning undertaken by managers and governors – good.

External support

The local authority has monitored the work of the school well. Many aspects of the statement of action have been implemented including support for addressing low attendance within the school and assisting the headteacher in developing a strategy to address the school's historical financial overspend. Along with the school improvement partner, London Challenge and Education London, it has provided effective support for many areas of the school's work including leadership and

management and teaching and learning. The plans for the school to become a National Challenge Trust school are progressing well.