

Tribal Education  
1-4 Portland Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 0845 123 6001  
Direct F 0845 123 6002  
email:sarah.cartlidge@tribalgroup.com



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Mr G Crook  
Headteacher  
Bowden House School  
Firle Road  
Seaford  
Essex  
BN25 2JB

Dear Mr Crook

### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 14 September 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. In particular, please convey my thanks to Mr Walton, the head of education. I greatly enjoyed meeting the boys and I would like you to thank them for being friendly and helpful.

The school continues to take students on a weekly residential basis as a state-funded boarding school, which is managed by Tower Hamlets local authority. All 29 students have complex behavioural social and emotional difficulties and some have other special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students' ages range from 9 to 17 years of age; they join the school at different points in their education.

Since the last inspection, the school has appointed a specialist teacher for science, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT) and for students' personal, social and health education (PHSE). Additional teaching assistants have been recruited. In particular, two teaching assistants have responsibility for the growing coordination and support of college and work experience placements. The senior leadership team has been restructured with the appointment of a new head of education and two assistant headteachers. The school has continued to modify the boarding house accommodation. A new life skills kitchen has been created and a mobile classroom is now in place for design and technology. The governing body has increased and the partnership with the local authority has strengthened considerably. Plans are being explored to build a new school in the grounds of the current school site, as the current accommodation is very cramped and not always fit for purpose.

As a result of the inspection on 22 October 2008, the school was asked to improve the following aspects:



- improve the use of progress data by subject leaders in order to set more challenging targets to raise students' achievement
- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring learning objectives are precise and clearly understood by students
- provide lessons in a modern foreign language for students in Key Stage 3
- meet the National Minimum Standards for boarding by recording bullying incidents and how these are resolved, recording incidents of restraint, and by reviewing risk assessments more consistently and, finally, by ensuring prompt recording of fire drills.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Students continue to appreciate and value the 'fresh start' given to them through securing a place at Bowden House. At the time of the last inspection, students' academic achievement was found to be satisfactory; the school is building on this well although student attainment continues to be much lower than average. The aspirations of leaders and staff have risen considerably and targets are set for more students to do GCSEs. In 2010, for example, the proportion gaining a GCSE in English and mathematics improved steadily and in art, three students gained a 'B' grade. Vocational training has increased, with a good number of units achieved in food technology, ICT and in external leadership skills tests.

Improved teaching and learning underpin students' increasing achievement. Teachers now ensure that lessons are planned to meet students' needs and they are helped to understand and be clear about what they are learning. The lessons seen during the monitoring visit showed that learning is usually fun and inspiring and students mostly behave well in lessons, although occasionally some students lose control. When this occurs, teachers and assistants remain calm and handle the situation well with strong back-up support. Learning is aided by teachers' better ICT skills, generally high expectations and effective use of resources to engage students' interests.

During the visit, students were seen working hard on science experiments, designing and making cars in design and technology, and cooking and doing ICT. This is the first school year that a student will be entered for GCSE science and the school has plans in place to extend examination opportunities in design and technology. Pupils now have the opportunity to learn French and exciting plans are being drawn up for a trip to France. Pupils benefit from a much improved support structure for additional literacy, numeracy, music, outdoor activities and through a counselling service. These are helping students to make better progress. Leaders' current development plan correctly focuses on improving students' English skills. There is still much to do on this by strengthening links with other subjects so that students learn and practise their reading and writing skills as part of other activities.



There has been outstanding progress in developing the 'Extended Leadership' programme of work, which students love. Students gain much from acting as leaders when camping, hiking, map reading and when taking part in extensive and sometimes extreme physical skills, such as surfing and caving in places such as Wales and Yorkshire. This aspect of the curriculum is making an increasingly significant contribution to the emotional and physical well-being of the students and their improving self-esteem, resilience and cooperation. Moreover, this is used to motivate them to work harder on their academic skills.

While attendance has improved steadily in the last year, it remains far too low overall for students' best possible longer-term economic well-being. Leaders know this and are doing all that they can to improve attendance. However, attendance is often dragged down by students missing the Sunday afternoon school return bus or because of their complex medical needs.

Dedicated staff continue to ensure high-quality care for the boys. All National Minimum Standards are now fully met for boarding, as evident in the most recent Care Inspection in 2009. An anti-bullying committee was established in May 2009 and this is working well. As one pupil commented when talking about being a past bully, 'That's not me any more; I'm not like that now'. The school's aim of promoting 'Care, Cooperation and Collaboration' has strengthened still further.

Leaders have greatly improved the way that they assess students' skills and attitudes on entry to the school. This is giving them a much better baseline from which to track students' progress and set challenging targets. Leaders are now more fully involved in checking students' progress from week to week. Leaders' clear vision and high expectations underpin the good capacity to improve. There is a trend for improving achievement coming through the school. Notably, staff training and a richer curriculum are at the core of improvement. For example, teaching and care assistants have been working to gain their GCSE in mathematics, so that they can also help the students more effectively. Students are becoming increasingly motivated to do mathematics and keenly told the inspector about this.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons  
Additional Inspector

