

Tribal
1-4 Portland
Square
BRISTOL
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 4234
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0300 123 4234
Ofstedhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk

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Mr Mike Conn
The Principal
Bexhill High School
Down Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN39 4HT

Dear Mr Conn

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when my colleagues and I inspected your school on 11 May 2010, for the time the acting principal gave to our telephone discussions ahead of the visit, and for the information provided before and during our time in school. Would you please pass on my thanks to the students and the vice chair of governors who met with us.

In September, the main school is to move to new buildings on the site currently housing Years 7 and 8. The site now occupied by Years 9 to 11 will have new accommodation for vocational education. In September of last year, a strategic improvement partner was employed by the school to help raise attainment. Since January, operational leadership has been in the hands of the deputy principal in the role of acting principal. The principal has focused on managing the development of the new school. Recruitment is difficult, including staff for English and mathematics. Since September 2008, the school has received support from a National Challenge adviser as part of a government school improvement programme.

As a result of the inspection on 11 and 12 June 2008, the school was asked to: extend and securely embed strategies to raise attainment, including in Key Stage 3; improve teaching and learning promptly so that every student actively engages in learning and makes progress in every lesson; and, make better use of data for planning and promoting students' progress.

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

Students' achievement has weakened since the last inspection. Attainment, as measured by examination results in Year 11, has remained below the national average for the last two years and the school's targets have been missed. This represents inadequate overall progress for the year groups concerned. Fewer students than expected achieved five GCSE grades at C or above, including in mathematics and English. Since September, the school has begun to focus more closely on identifying Year 10 and 11 students at risk of underachieving. They are being provided with more effective support, including work with parents and carers, and are making better progress. However, there remains some way to go to tackle the legacy of underachievement for these students. The school has begun to work with local primary schools to improve students' attainment on entry and set more challenging targets for Key Stage 3. However, slow progress in improving teaching means that learning at this key stage does not provide a solid platform for what comes later. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because their needs are effectively identified and catered for.

Targets linked to the school's specialist status for technology have been missed in relation to overall attainment and to participation and attainment in the subject areas related to technology.

Work to improve teaching was ineffective in the year following the inspection so that the quality of provision weakened. While a wide range of monitoring and support was provided for staff, its impact was inconsistent in tackling weak practice or in sharing effective approaches. Recruitment difficulties have affected the quality of learning, notably in English and mathematics, and students say there is a lack of continuity in teaching. More robust action from September 2009 has reduced the amount of inadequate teaching, including through coaching from external partners. Support for newly qualified teachers is good. Nevertheless, there is too little good or better teaching and lessons continue to reflect some weaknesses evident in the last inspection. Notably, students usually know what to do but do not always understand the criteria for successful work so as to take the initiative in their learning. In addition, some teachers find difficulty in communicating aspects of subject knowledge to students, which impedes progress. In these circumstances, behaviour deteriorates and is not always well managed by teachers.

Efforts to make better use of assessment information to support learning got off to a slow start. Accurate assessment and tracking of students' attainment has been developed in most subjects and is starting to be used effectively in some to support planning, for example in mathematics. However, this is not consistent and too many lessons are not planned to meet the needs of all abilities. While students usually know their target grades or levels, many are still unsure what to do to reach them. Marking remains patchy. Some is highly effective, while in other cases it is incomplete or cursory. Teachers' in-class assessment of progress is not always good enough to inform them of how much learning has taken place so as to adjust their teaching or plan the next steps. The better progress starting to be made by students in GCSE mathematics and English is underpinned by sharper use of assessment data

to identify those underachieving and monitor the impact of the support provided. This model has not been applied to the school as a whole.

The capacity of leaders and managers to bring about improvements in teaching and attainment was initially undermined by a number of factors. The development of the new school occupied much of the principal's attention and interfered with a sharp focus on raising attainment. The coordination of efforts to improve teaching was unclear. While leaders at different levels were involved in monitoring teaching, the approach adopted was inconsistent. For example, there were variations in the quality of feedback to staff in different subjects and no systematic link between the focus for observations and targets set for individual staff. Strategic planning reflected too little urgency in bringing about change and the governing body did not hold the school to account for students' weakening progress. Support from the local authority made an inadequate impact on achievement. However, in September the school and the local authority recognised that things needed to change. A new and more focused plan for raising attainment was written with support from the National Challenge Adviser. Better use began to be made of staff from other external partners, including the strategic improvement partner and the local authority. In January, the promotion of the deputy principal to acting principal led to more emphasis on improving teaching. Nevertheless, these changes are recent and, although there are signs of greater impact, there remains uncertainty over the school's capacity to improve.

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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector