

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
BRISTOL
BS2 8RR

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

Direct T 0845 123 6001
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: Fiona.allan1@tribalgroup.com

21 June 2010

Mr Stephen Smith
The Acting Headteacher
Whitstone
Charlton Road
Shepton Mallet
Somerset
BA4 5PF

Dear Mr Smith

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Joanna Peach and I inspected your school on Thursday 10 June 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like to offer our thanks to the students, staff and governors who spoke to us during the inspection.

Since the last inspection the number of students on roll has fallen from 722 to 645 and, alongside a smaller budget allocation, has resulted in a number of redundancies. At the end of 2009 the headteacher left the school and one of the school's deputy headteachers has become acting headteacher for two terms. The head of English has been brought on to the leadership team as acting deputy headteacher and two members of the English department now share responsibility for its leadership until the end of this academic year. Despite the uncertainty and stress which initially followed the job losses and headteacher's departure, the current senior leadership team has worked extremely well to support staff. Consequently, morale at the school has improved and is now positive again. A new headteacher has been appointed for September 2010 and staff are looking forward to the future with increased confidence.

As a result of the inspection on 11 and 12 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise the quality of teaching and learning by eradicating inconsistencies, particularly in:
 - the use of data to ensure students' good progress
 - the quality of feedback to students about their work and how to improve it
 - the expectations in relation to the setting of homework.
- Improve the effectiveness of some middle leaders in terms of self-evaluation and target setting, so as to speed up students' progress.

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

Achievement overall is satisfactory and, despite a fall in 2008, attainment has improved to be broadly in line with the national average and is rising in most subjects. After the unexpected drop in results in 2008, the school correctly identified that its work to change the structure and strategic direction of the school had had an adverse effect on student achievement. Robust action has been taken by school leaders with the result that incidents of underachievement are being addressed more effectively than before. Significant improvement to data management systems is now enabling school leaders and staff to identify and arrest students' underachievement quickly. For example, improved use of assessment information has enabled the school to identify Year 11 students in most need of support in preparation for GCSE examinations. Students' progress is tracked regularly and targeted support, particularly for English and mathematics, is helping to accelerate progress. The school's coherent and comprehensive student intervention programme is driven by a senior school leader and its impact can be seen in the much improved examination results in 2009. School predictions indicate that this progress will be sustained in 2010. A small number of students at school action level made less than expected progress in 2009, but an analysis of current achievement shows that all students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are achieving in line with their peers.

Challenging targets are now set as the benchmark for all subjects and have helped to raise expectations and achievement across the curriculum. In September 2009 senior leaders introduced a training programme to focus and develop the work of all curriculum leaders in leading and managing improvement. The programme has helped to bring about a clearer dialogue of improvement and an increased involvement in developing accurate self-evaluation. Previous over generosity in self-evaluation has been addressed and middle leaders now have a much clearer understanding of the relationship between the quality of provision in their subject and the impact that this has on learning and student outcomes. Middle leaders are held more clearly to account than before and the progress of their department against agreed targets is regularly monitored. However, while senior staff are increasingly rigorous in their analysis of performance data, not all middle leaders give due attention to students' achievement or the progress made by different groups of learners in their self-evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation systems have been strengthened by the development of learning reviews which accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and the use of assessment. Whilst inspectors saw mostly satisfactory lessons and some good teaching, a small percentage of inadequate teaching was also seen. School leaders acknowledge that teaching is not consistently good in all curriculum areas because there is not always sufficient focus on learning outcomes. Although teachers now have access to good assessment and achievement

data for all students, not all staff use this information to inform teaching strategies and devise learning opportunities to meet all students' needs, especially the most able. Students stated that where learning is active, they are more engaged, enjoy their learning and make better progress. There are clear expectations with regard to assessment and the setting of homework and how it is used differently across the subjects to support and extend learning. As a result, marking and assessment have improved since the last inspection. Inspectors saw particularly good examples in English, art and religious studies where teachers provide precise subject-specific guidance which clearly identifies what students need to do to improve their work. In some other cases, guidance is of limited value and simply confirms that students have completed work, corrects what they have written, or provides general comments.

The school has used its specialist status for technology to ensure that students have access to a wide and varied technology curriculum. Students speak positively about the broad range of learning opportunities available and the proportions studying design and technology are much higher than that seen nationally. However, the school is not consistently meeting its specialist targets across the required range of technology and associated subjects.

The school has benefitted from good support from the local authority, particularly in the period after the drop in results in 2008. The School Improvement Partner and consultants for the core subjects have put in place an effective support programme. The impact of this support has enabled the school to focus well on addressing the key points from the last inspection and to keep a focus on learning and achievement, especially in English and mathematics.

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

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector