

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
BRISTOL
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 Direct T 0845 123 6001
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Direct F 0117 315 0430
www.ofsted.gov.uk Email: Fiona.allan1@tribalgroup.com

20 July 2010

Mr S Clark
The Headteacher
Melksham Oak Community School
Devizes Road
Melksham
Wiltshire
SN12 8QZ

Dear Mr Clark

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 July 2010 and for the information which you provided prior to, and during, my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the students, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body who gave their time to talk to me.

Since the last inspection the school has appointed a second deputy headteacher. An aspiring advanced skills teacher has been appointed in mathematics. The school has relocated to a new purpose-built site and has changed its name.

As a result of the inspection on 2-3 December 2009, the school was asked to:

- provide targeted intervention in order to secure improved attainment for current Year 11 students in GCSE examinations in 2010, particularly in mathematics and science
- improve the quality of teaching across the school, by ensuring that teachers' planning provides sufficient pace and challenge, engages and motivates students and uses all the assessment data available to ensure that work is closely matched to individual students' learning needs
- analyse more effectively the extensive data already collected through monitoring, in order to evaluate the impact of actions taken, and interventions made, on students' achievement and well-being and use that evaluation to prioritise a limited number of areas for improvement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Standards as measured by GCSE examinations in 2009 were below national average. The school's data show that attainment in English and mathematics for the current Year 11 cohort has risen. The data analysis also shows that the school is on line to meet challenging targets for the proportion of students attaining five grade A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Attainment in science has risen also, albeit from a very low baseline, but there remains some underachievement in that subject. The improvements have come about as a result of a wide range of intervention strategies and because of the school's concentration on improving the quality of teaching and learning in lessons.

One-to-one tuition has been well targeted, with the school making considered decisions based on data analysis about which students would benefit most. The school has made good use of external mentors to provide that tuition, which has been evaluated highly by the students involved. The mathematics department received good support from a seconded senior leader who worked alongside the teachers as they developed teaching and assessment skills. The department formed two new classes which then followed a new examination programme. This change allowed teachers to analyse carefully, and address, areas of weakness in the students' mathematical knowledge and skills and thereby raise attainment. External support was also available to the science department. The impact of intervention has had less success in raising attainment in science because of the numbers of classes targeted and because of the diverse range of examination courses for which students were being prepared. In all Year 11 classes students' progress has been carefully monitored.

Teachers' lesson planning has improved. It is detailed and learning objectives are well focused on what students are to learn. Other sections of the school's lesson planning form are less consistently well used. Teachers identify students whose individual needs should be met but the quality of the strategies planned to meet those needs varies widely. The best strategies are detailed and subject specific and students are working on activities well matched to their abilities. Other strategies are too brief and do not identify clearly enough how teachers will match work to students' needs. In the lessons observed teachers managed their classes well and behaviour was good. Students know their targets and respond well to the opportunities to peer- and self-assess. These opportunities help them get a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers use a good range of activities and resources to motivate their students who report that lessons are more structured than they used to be. When students are actively involved in their learning, there is a good level of engagement. There remain areas of inconsistency in classroom practice. Occasionally, teachers concentrate too much on behaviour management and there is, as a result, less emphasis on the subject knowledge and skills students need. Teachers use plenaries to assess what classes have learned but questioning is, on occasions, insufficiently challenging. Not all teachers are providing the follow-up questions to probe students' understanding; neither are they allowing students enough thinking time before they answer.

The school has worked hard to eradicate inadequate teaching and improve satisfactory teaching. The system of training and lesson observations championed by one of the deputy headteachers has succeeded in bringing discussions on teaching and impact on learning to the fore. The intensive programme of observations that took place in Term 4 has led to the senior leadership team having a clear idea of teachers' strengths and areas for development. This information has been used well to set up profiles of skills and to match teachers and coaches together to help teachers develop their practice. A good benchmark has thus been established. Changes to practice are not yet embedded across the school and the senior leaders need to assure themselves that they have evidence of teachers consistently performing at a higher level. The school is being well supported by the governing body in the drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The raising attainment plan has been an extensive document designed to meet a range of needs and audiences. The plan has been modified as targets have been met. What the improvement planning process does not yet effectively do, is analyse data on student outcomes in order to set targets. In response to the last inspection the senior leaders modified the self-evaluation process to ensure that middle leaders reviewed the impact of their actions. The quality of these amended self-evaluation forms is variable in the use of data when quantifying evidence. The newly designed self-evaluation form is intended to ensure that all middle leaders consider, in the first instance, what hard data on students' outcomes they have at their disposal before they analyse their area's strengths and weaknesses. This will then support a school-level analysis which will inform the improvement planning process.

The school is a specialist technology college and technological resources in the new school have been well planned to ensure a good level of entitlement for students. In the past, funding has been used appropriately to extend the use of technology in subjects.

The local authority statement of action meets requirements. The school has made very good use of the support provided by the local authority and the additional external support it has brokered. The support plan has been well targeted particularly in relation to intervention and the teaching observation programme. Success criteria are regularly monitored so that the school can measure the progress it has made.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector