

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 0117 311 5319
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Direct email: matthew.parker@tribalgroup.com

25 January 2013

Mrs A Konarzewski and Miss C Sadler
Executive headteacher and Head of School
York Road Junior Academy
York Road
Dartford
DA1 1SQ

Dear Mrs Konarzewski and Miss Sadler

No formal designation monitoring inspection of York Road Junior Academy

Following my visit, with Alan Taylor-Bennett, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 23–24 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, subject leaders and representatives of those responsible for the governance of the academy. Inspectors spoke with pupils, listened to them read and looked at their work. Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering all year groups. Nine of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

York Road Junior Academy opened on 1 April 2012 as a member of the Leigh Academies Trust. The York Road Development Group represents the Trust and is responsible for the governance of the academy. Most of the staff from the predecessor school transferred to the academy. Since then, one of the deputy

headteachers and a teacher have left. The headteacher is on maternity leave. In September, an executive headteacher, who is the headteacher of a local outstanding school, was seconded for two-and-a-half days a week to lead the academy for a year. The leadership is shared with the former deputy headteacher who is now head of school.

There are 341 pupils currently on roll which is more than the average-sized primary school. The proportions of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and who speak English as an additional language are below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action and school action plus is above average. The academy's Star Centre is a specialist language facility which admits pupils aged 4–11 years from across the area. All of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs for speech, language and communication difficulties. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is high.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

From their low starting points, pupils are now beginning to make better progress, and some gaps in their knowledge, such as how to read unfamiliar words, are being closed rapidly. However, standards in English and mathematics throughout the academy remain below average. The senior leaders understand the progress that pupils are making and what more they must achieve to reach the standards expected for their age. They have communicated this clearly and unequivocally to staff. Pupils now know what levels they are working on and are beginning to use clear, next-level targets to help them improve more quickly.

The academy's information on pupils' progress is organised efficiently and analysed well. It shows clearly that, although the progress that pupils are making is beginning to accelerate, there is too much variability between different classes, groups of pupils and subjects. This reflects inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In most of the lessons observed during the inspection, pupils made appropriate gains in their learning. However, they were not challenged well enough by the teaching to make more rapid progress. In a few of the lessons seen, that did not build pupils' skills systematically and their progress was inadequate. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs in the Star Centre benefit from more consistently effective teaching in purposeful, well-organised classrooms so they make good learning gains from their various starting points.

Senior leaders know that pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs at school action and school action plus are not improving their rates of progress enough. Steps are being taken to put this right, for example these pupils' needs are discussed in regular meetings with staff and a new inclusion manager has been recently appointed. Nevertheless, the academy is not able to determine how additional pupil premium funding has made a difference to the

progress of eligible pupils because its expenditure and impact have not been made explicit or monitored.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving and is helping pupils to learn more quickly. However, lessons are not yet consistently good enough for all pupils to make up for previous underachievement. Some inadequate teaching remains and leaders are taking appropriate steps to eradicate this. Teachers are keen to improve their practice and act on the feedback they are given. They have a clearer understanding of what leaders expect to see in each lesson. Common features include managing pupils' behaviour well, sharing the learning intentions and success criteria with pupils, demonstrating how pupils can approach a task and encouraging them to share their responses with a partner. These features have provided a useful structure for teachers to start building their skills but they do not yet have a well-developed understanding of what makes teaching good or better. Consequently, they are focused on delivering the planned lesson more than checking that all pupils are learning as well as they can.

Pupils made less than good progress in lessons when teachers talked for too long so they sat listening passively rather than getting quickly involved in learning activities. The variety of strategies used to excite and involve them was limited and teachers' questions did not probe their understanding or stretch their thinking sufficiently. Teachers did not monitor how well all pupils were learning throughout the lesson closely enough, or adjust their approaches if pupils did not understand or they were ready to move on to their next step. Although different tasks are generally provided for pupils of varying abilities, these are not always well matched to what pupils can already do or build their skills progressively.

The quality of marking has improved and is providing pupils with clearer information about how they can do better. This is making a difference. The quality of work seen in pupils' books has improved.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say that they feel safe and better able to learn because behaviour has improved, particularly since September. They like the new behaviour management approach, which includes rewards, attendance certificates and a merit dashboard in every class. It is applied consistently across the academy so pupils respond well. There are effective links with specialist agencies and parents and carers which are helping to support those pupils who have particular difficulties in managing their own behaviour. Pupils say that there is some bullying but feel it has reduced a lot and are confident that staff are supportive and respond to any concerns that they have. Pupils behave appropriately in lessons, even when some of them are uninspiring. Behaviour at break times can be boisterous but pupils respond readily to

reminders about what is acceptable. A clear understanding that any physical aggression will not be tolerated has been firmly established.

Pupils are positive about school, keen and willing to learn. Opportunities to help them take responsibility for their learning and increase their independence are at the early stages of development.

Most pupils attend school regularly. Attendance and punctuality are monitored carefully and any absences followed up appropriately. The support of specialist agencies is sought when necessary. Some pupils are now arriving at school on time more often.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The executive headteacher and head of school work well together and have been single-minded in their focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards. They recognise that, while improvements have been made, particularly since September and in behaviour, there is more to be done if pupils are to achieve well. Robust, regular discussions about the progress that pupils are making in each class are being used to set performance targets for teachers.

Senior leaders accurately identify the strengths in lessons and areas that need further development. They provide teachers with useful feedback which is readily received. Staff feel supported, are eager to improve and are increasingly positive about the changes that are being made. Effective links have been made with the executive leader's school to share best practice and build teachers' skills in accurately assessing the levels that pupils are working at. This has contributed to improvements in marking.

Although subject leaders are relatively new to their roles, they have an understanding of pupils' performance in the areas for which they are responsible. The head of school has shared data with them and they have started to undertake some monitoring activities. The inclusion manager has been in post for three weeks and has quickly started to check that the right pupils are being identified as having special educational needs. Better use is also being made of the specialist skills of other adults to support pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The senior leaders report monthly to the Trust through the York Road Development Group. The group considers the key areas of the academy's work but is not helping to drive improvement more quickly because there is a lack of clarity between the senior leaders and the Trust about their different roles, responsibilities and priorities. This is because plans for improvement at all levels are not well developed. There has been a reliance on plans that were put in place before the academy joined the Trust, which are out-of-date and not matched to the current context of the academy. Plans that are available lack quantifiable targets and milestones to measure the progress

that is being made. They do not specify the resources needed, how actions will be monitored and their impact evaluated, or by whom. This lack of clarity has led to some tensions between the academy leaders and those responsible for its governance, for example in relation to the provision of computers for pupils.

Members of the development group are skilled and knowledgeable. They visit the academy but have not yet established a systematic programme of focused visits linked to monitoring the progress of an up-to-date improvement plan. Consequently, governance arrangements are not yet sufficiently well established to hold leaders to account robustly for improvement.

External support

The secondment of the executive headteacher and support provided by lead teachers from her school are helping to improve teaching, accelerate the progress that pupils are making and strengthen the academy's leadership. The Trust has provided additional support from a local special school which has helped to improve provision in the Star Centre. The impact of further support will be reliant on a clear plan which identifies what is needed and who is best able to provide it.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good and pupils achieve well by:
 - giving teachers regular opportunities to see good and outstanding teaching
 - making sure they use what they see to improve their own practice
 - ensuring teachers continuously assess how well all pupils are learning in each lesson and using the information to adjust their approaches when pupils are not learning well.

- Senior leaders and the York Road Development Group work together to establish a robust plan for improvement as a matter of urgency which:
 - includes quantifiable targets, milestones and success measures
 - identifies the resources allocated and those responsible for implementing actions
 - is systematically monitored and robustly evaluated to hold staff at all levels to account for the impact of their work.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the York Road Development Group and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Krafft

Her Majesty's Inspector