

Serco Inspections
Boundary House
2 Wythall Green Way
Middle Lane
BIRMINGHAM
West Midlands
B47 6LW

OFSTED

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

SERCO

Direct T 0121 683 2888



Friday 26 November 2010

Mr Tony Cooper
The Centre School
High Street
Cottenham
Cambridge
CB24 8UA

Dear Mr Cooper

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Centre School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 November 2010, 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 the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009.

Raise achievement and strengthen learning and progress by:

- implementing effective means of measuring students' attainment on entry
- tracking students' progress over time and measuring their outcomes
- setting challenging targets for the school and students.

Manage students' behaviour in the classroom in order that they can learn effectively by:

- setting out clear expectations for staff and students
- ensuring a clearly articulated approach to managing behaviour is applied consistently by all staff
- writing and implementing effective behaviour plans for all students.

Strengthen lessons and eliminate inadequate teaching by:

- developing and implementing a systematic and rigorous assessment of learning
- ensuring all lessons are planned in the light of assessment information
- making learning objectives clear and sharing them effectively with students.

Increase equality of opportunity by:

- planning a broad and balanced curriculum which makes adequate provision for literacy and numeracy
- providing the extra help needed by students who have more difficulty than most with learning in literacy and numeracy
- promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Strengthen leadership and management by:

- clarifying a vision, developing clear aims and setting high expectations for the school, the staff and students
- creating an effective senior leadership structure, leadership throughout the school and an adequate administration system
- establishing comprehensive, rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work
- ensuring governors challenge and hold the school to account for the effectiveness of its provision and students' outcomes.

Special measures: monitoring of The Centre School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, met with the executive headteacher, head of the school, external leadership consultant, pupils, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority, and spoke to the school improvement partner.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection one teacher left the school at the end of the summer term. Two teachers were appointed and started in September 2010; one of these teachers subsequently resigned and has left the school.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The progress pupils make during lessons is more varied than at the last monitoring visit. Pupils make good progress in more lessons but there are also more lessons where progress is inadequate for some pupils. There are still too many lessons where the challenge for pupils is too low or some pupils are given too much help to complete activities, preventing them from thinking and working things out for themselves. Where progress is good, staff have a good understanding of the pupils' previous knowledge and take account of their literacy levels so that materials are presented in an accessible form. Questioning is at different levels for different pupils and there is an expectation that all pupils will contribute to discussion. In the better lessons, individual targets are used well to ensure progress but pupils are not always familiar enough with these and are not always sufficiently involved in understanding how much progress they are making. Good baseline and ongoing assessments ensure that additional literacy intervention is well targeted for specific pupils. Pupils receiving this additional support increase their progress as a result. There are a few pupils with additional needs who need more specialised support consistently across all lessons. Pupils are also making better progress in the daily basic skills lessons which focus on individualised reading, writing, spelling and numeracy programmes. School tracking demonstrates an increase in the progress pupils are making over time and improvements in attendance have helped this. Although the last cohort to leave the school did not achieve at a satisfactory level, more pupils are on track to gain suitable accreditation at levels which reflects at least satisfactory progress. For a few, particularly those with lower attendance, long-term targets are not challenging enough. Both the attainment levels and progress rates of pupils have increased since the last monitoring visit.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise achievement and strengthen learning and progress – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils have continued to improve their attitude to learning and many more are motivated to work hard and engage with lessons. Better behaviour helps pupils feel safer within school. Fewer pupils are leaving lessons and the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour has continued to decline. Pupils behave best when activities are engaging and at the right level of challenge. There are a few successful opportunities for pupils to learn to work with each other but these are not provided often enough. Staff are more consistent in their responses to pupils and this helps to reduce conflict. Although the number of pupils excluded is very similar to the same time last year, the number of exclusions has dropped considerably. Individual behaviour plans are reviewed regularly and most pupils make satisfactory progress towards reaching their individual targets. Behaviour is better throughout the school day, although comparatively more incidents still occur at lesson change-over times, breaks and the end of the day when there is less structure available.

Pupils' enjoyment and interest in work during the recent 'Mexico themed days' demonstrates a developing awareness and improved attitude to learning about different cultures and beliefs.

Attendance has continued to improve and more pupils attend more regularly. The number of pupils who attend less than 80% of the time has significantly reduced.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Manage students' behaviour in the classroom in order that they can learn effectively – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Many staff are capitalising on the positive change in pupils' attitude to learning. There is more good teaching where lessons start swiftly and have a clear focus, which is appreciated by the pupils. Where teaching is good pupils understand what they are learning and it is made relevant to their lives. Teachers plan according to the pupils' previous learning and make further adjustments during lessons in response to the pupils' levels of understanding. Planning for the range of afternoon sessions has improved and the focus on ensuring that pupils make at least satisfactory progress is more evident. Pupils respond well when given opportunities

to be more active in their learning, especially when they are allowed to be more independent. At times, opportunities for pupils to think for themselves are prevented by staff prompting pupils too frequently or continually asking questions and this reduces thinking time and learning. In contrast, some very good examples were observed where staff gave initial support to pupils and then allowed them to continue working independently. The endings of lessons are not as well developed as the beginnings, timings are variable and transition to the next session is not always clearly communicated to pupils.

The curriculum on offer has continued to improve with more lessons and additional subjects being taught in the mornings, for example design technology and physical education. Bringing in specialist teaching time from the federated mainstream school and access to additional rooms has helped to improve the curriculum. Afternoon options have also been improved so that more offer a suitable pathway to accreditation and future choices.

Consistent tracking of the attendance and behaviour of individuals has enabled staff to provide better guidance and support, helping pupils to attend more frequently and make better progress in developing social skills.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen lessons and eliminate inadequate teaching – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and executive headteacher have continued their focus on raising expectations of pupils. With support from advanced skills teachers from the federated mainstream school, many teachers and instructors have improved their practice. There is a clear link between the training and feedback given to staff and some of the improved skills observed in classes. There are some staff who are still finding the higher expectations difficult to meet.

The plans to enable the headteacher to have fewer teaching sessions have been thwarted by one of the qualified teachers appointed in September leaving. There are not enough teachers with the breadth of experience to ensure good curriculum development. Support from the external leadership consultant continues and this has helped to sustain some of the leadership capacity. The head of pupil welfare and administrative staff also ensure that their roles help to maintain the leadership focus on the priorities for improvement. Although there is still variation in the outcomes for pupils, the improved curriculum and additional intervention has meant that there has been good progress in increasing equality of opportunity.

Members of the governing body and other professionals working with the school acknowledge the difficulties faced by the headteacher not having sufficient time for her development and leadership role. Creative solutions are being considered to ensure that the capacity of the leadership is increased so that the good progress made since the inspection in 2009 is maintained. Budget planning is clearer than previously and there is a suitable plan to help the school move from a deficit to a balanced budget.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen leadership and management – satisfactory.
- Increase equality of opportunity – good.

External support

The support provided by the local authority is well focused. Additional time from the local authority inspector and the school improvement partner has provided the school with an ongoing objective view. Advice has been well received and has helped the school to continue improving the provision on offer for pupils. Discussion around the outcomes for pupils is both supportive and challenging. The headteacher and other staff have benefited from this dialogue and have responded well, taking action where needed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the number of teachers available to the school.