

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 **Direct email:** Fiona.allan1@tribalgroup.com

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Mrs Anne Southgate
The Headteacher
Saint George's Church of England School
Meadow Road
Gravesend
Kent
DA11 7LS

Dear Mrs Southgate

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Saint George's Church of England School

Following my visit with Sheena MacDonald HMI and Evelyn Riley, Addition Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 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 December 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement, which were identified during that inspection, is 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 – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to discussion with the monitoring inspector.

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 director of education for the diocese, the chair of the governing body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate students' rate of progress in all subjects and especially in mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportions of teaching and learning that are at least good and reducing inadequate teaching
 - sharpening planning and lesson delivery so that work is always well matched to the differing learning needs of students
 - developing teachers' skills in managing any poor behaviour
 - ensuring lessons are interesting and engage students actively in learning
 - having higher expectations of what students can achieve and ensuring that they are consistently challenged in every lesson.

- Embed effective assessment practices in all subjects by:
 - using the information from regular assessments to sharpen the focus on learning
 - improving questioning and marking so students are clear about how to improve their work.

- Increase the rigour of school self-evaluation by:
 - monitoring improvements particularly in teaching and learning more robustly
 - developing the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they can more effectively iron out the inconsistencies in students' achievement in different subjects and firmly tackle any inadequate teaching
 - ensuring that the policy and procedures to manage students' behaviour are consistently applied by all teachers.

- Improve the attendance and the monitoring of attendance in the sixth form.

Special measures: monitoring of Saint George's Church of England School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 November 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and managers, groups of students, the consultant headteacher, governors and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors observed 21 parts of lessons from across the curriculum. Four lessons were jointly observed with a senior leader. In addition, three learning walks were conducted focusing on behaviour and assessment practice and three tutor groups visited.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been several staffing changes, including at middle and senior levels. Roles and responsibilities of the senior team have been reviewed and revised.

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

In the sample of lesson observations undertaken more than half were judged to be securing good or better progress for students. In a small minority of lessons, students made outstanding progress. There were no lessons that were judged inadequate. This demonstrates an improvement from the previous visit and a significant improvement from the last inspection. Inspection findings were closely aligned with the school's own judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. The quality of teaching observed was consistently strongest in the specialist humanities subjects which include English. This results in good progress being made in these subjects. Effective leadership of teaching and learning has led to an improving profile across the curriculum and very good lessons were observed in drama and art. However, there remains some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Slower progress was observed in a few lessons and the school's accurate monitoring records show relative weakness in technology. Where teaching is best, students are actively engaged in their learning and demonstrate obvious enjoyment.

Unvalidated GCSE results for 2010 have become available since the last monitoring visit. These show that the number of good passes including English and mathematics rose by 5% to 46%. As a result of improvements in teaching in English, this year group made faster progress than their predecessors and there was a sharp rise in their levels of attainment in English. Although attainment in mathematics rose slightly, improvements were not as significant as in English. Across the school students are set, and increasingly reaching, challenging targets in both mathematics and English. Evidence from the inspection, such as improved progress in lessons and

accurate tracking and intervention, demonstrates that the school is accelerating progress across the curriculum including in mathematics.

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

- accelerate students' rate of progress in all subjects and especially in mathematics – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour seen around the school and in lessons was mostly good. This was particularly the case in lessons where the quality of teaching was best. In a few less successful lessons students lost focus or, in the worst cases, indulged in low-level disruption. Movement around the school was orderly and punctuality to lessons was generally good. However, this was not replicated in moving to tutor time at the end of the first day of inspection. At this time a general reluctance to move quickly adversely affected punctuality.

Attendance was similar in 2009/10 to the previous year and slightly below the national average. The school has worked hard to improve attendance with rewards and sanctions. This has resulted in a marked decrease in the number of students who are persistently absent and overall attendance has improved markedly this term to be above average.

The effectiveness of provision

The school has successfully developed a shared understanding amongst the staff about what constitutes good and outstanding teaching. This is articulated in a new teaching, learning and assessment policy and underpinned by intensive training. It has resulted in significant improvements in the consistency and quality of teaching across the school. In the curriculum areas where the policy is fully embedded, teachers' plan well-structured lessons with lively, engaging activities and clear learning objectives. The use of assessment, particularly in lessons, is an aspect which has seen the most rapid improvement since the last visit. Most teachers now routinely use prior attainment data to plan lessons to meet the needs of the full range of learners in their classes. Target grades and assessment criteria are used to highlight how learners might improve their work in lessons. Students are now far more aware of their targets and their progress towards achieving them than they were at the time of the last visit. A strong feature of the best lessons is good quality questioning that sharpens students' focus on the lesson objectives and helps them to extend and articulate their learning. Peer and self-assessment are an increasingly common feature of lessons. A new approach to marking has been adopted by most teachers and, where done best, gives good quality written feedback which builds on the good quality of verbal feedback observed. This practice is not yet fully embedded in all lessons.

Effective tracking systems are now embedded and being used to analyse gaps in students' attainment. These systems have been used to target a range of

interventions at students. These include, for example, a personalised series of revision classes on Saturdays to boost mathematics attainment of Year 11 students. It is too early to fully judge the effectiveness of these sessions but students are positive about their impact.

The school recognises that the curriculum requires some improvement so that it better meets the needs and interests of all groups of students. Successful adaptations have been made to the curriculum in some subject areas to better meet varying needs and learning styles of students, but this is not universally the case.

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

- embed effective assessment practices in all subjects – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Further changes in senior and middle management have taken place since the last visit. These changes have brought about clearer accountability and a sharper focus on improvement that is having an increasingly positive impact. Rigorous and thorough systems for regular self-evaluation and review, which were new at the last visit, are now fully in place and being very beneficial to the quality of education provided by the school, particularly improving teaching and learning. There is a stronger, collegiate approach across departments which is resulting in shared sense of purpose and accuracy in acknowledging strengths and tackling areas of weakness. Feedback from regular and rigorous monitoring is useful and specific and well used by all leaders to reshape initiatives. Action taken, including well-targeted support and training, has resulted in improvements. Leaders' judgments on the quality of provision are accurate and well supported by evidence. Senior leaders, including the members of governing body, now have a very clear idea of the quality and consistency across departments. The governing body has undergone significant restructuring. This has established a greater clarity of purpose and resulted in governors who know the school well. Through the 'Challenge Committee' they are now more able to challenge school leaders effectively as well as providing strong support.

A new improvement plan has been formulated since the last visit which encapsulates the vision for the continuing to improve in the future. Areas for improvement, actions and systems for monitoring are appropriate and well organised. The plan was still in draft form at the time of the visit and, as a result, the milestones for improvement, success criteria and evaluation processes are yet to be fully identified.

The school's specialist subjects and their leaders have been instrumental in shaping improvements in the school. Many of the innovations in teaching and assessment practice have been piloted and embedded in the humanities and English, before being refined and applied in other curriculum areas. Specialist staff are also deployed effectively, training others and embedding best practice in the school.

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

- increase the rigour of school self-evaluation – good.

External support

The local authority has a very well-informed view of the progress the school is making, of its emerging strengths and continuing areas for development. Intensive support provided following the last inspection helped senior leaders establish a clear set of priorities. A review of leadership roles and responsibilities facilitated clearer focus and accountability in the school. As the school has made progress on the areas for improvement and demonstrated an increasing capacity to move forward alone, this support has been slowly scaled back. The School Improvement Partner and the consultant headteacher continue to effectively support and challenge the school.