

Tribal Education
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** 0845 123 6002
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** rebecca.jackson@tribalgroup.com

14 February 2011

Mr Chapman
Headteacher
Exeter House Special School
Somerset Road
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP1 3BL

Dear Mr Chapman

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Exeter House Special School

Following my visit to your school on 10–11 February 2011, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2010. 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 – satisfactory.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

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 Wiltshire.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010

- Improve the quality of lesson planning by:
 - ensuring that it is consistently focused on what pupils will learn
 - ensuring that the knowledge that the staff have of pupils' achievements is accurate and used to plan their work, with an emphasis on them making good progress.

- Extend the curriculum by increasing teaching and learning opportunities through shortened break and lunchtimes and ensuring that additional activities are focused on increasing pupils' achievement.

- Develop the roles of all senior staff to bring about effective support for the school's improvement and improving pupils' achievement.

Special measures: monitoring of Exeter House Special School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 10–11 February 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leadership team and representatives of the governing body.

Context

Since the school was inspected in October 2010 several important changes have taken place. Three assistant headteachers were appointed in November 2010, with responsibility for leading the primary, secondary and autistic spectrum disorders teams. Middle leadership responsibilities have just been agreed with staff for other areas of the school's work. An acting deputy headteacher has been working with the school on a temporary basis for three days a week.

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

In a physical education lesson the staff ensured that each pupil was set challenging targets that were carefully linked to previous achievement. Consequently, pupils' progress is sustained and their achievement in gymnastics is very high. Generally, though, expectations about what pupils can and should achieve are still too low. Achievement is very poor when pupils are not encouraged to use the available electronic resources or to discuss their work with peers who are working at the same level. Pupils are keen to learn and enjoy the activities that are prepared for them, even when they are not appropriate for their age. The use of the new school baseline data set and of the Department for Education's Progression Guidance has highlighted for the school that pupils working around National Curriculum Level 1 in literacy and numeracy are making little progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The newly established reward system and associated celebratory achievement assembly enables pupils of all abilities to contribute to their school and house community. The headteacher is aware that the time taken to get everyone ready is currently too long, mainly because of the cramped accommodation and the activity being so new. However, the assembly is helping to create a community spirit for staff and pupils alike. Most pupils enjoy the opportunity to come together as a school, to sing, and to celebrate each other's successes. Staff effectively support those pupils who find this experience too stressful so that these pupils can join in when they feel comfortable.

The effectiveness of provision

The variation in the quality of teaching and learning seen during the last inspection is being addressed. In the best lessons, such as that seen in history, opportunities are carefully planned to enable those pupils working at around the same level to learn together. This allows more-able pupils to develop independence through increasing their speaking and listening skills by talking with each other, and especially to investigate and solve problems for themselves. Less able pupils also benefit from having greater amounts of stimulation and structured learning from adults, but, again being with their peers and not always dependent upon adults to aid their learning. To help this happen pupils and staff use a wide range of augmented communication systems, such as signing, and by pupils using electronic talkers and computerised equipment. Teachers use microphones so that pupils can hear them clearly and the whole focus of the lesson is on what pupils need to learn. In the weakest lessons the converse happens, with the focus on the activity to be completed and on what adults are doing rather than on what pupils need to learn. Some of the tasks given to older pupils are not appropriate for their age because they do not help them prepare for life after compulsory schooling. These types of lessons are not inclusive and do not provide equality of opportunity.

The timetable has been evaluated and altered so that more time is now planned to be allocated to learning. There is now a common format for lesson planning in the short, medium and long term, which all teachers are using. All lessons have learning objectives and success criteria, although often these are too vague and focus more on what pupils will be doing rather than what they need to learn. This is because some teachers are understandably still focusing on their own role in lessons and on 'getting it right'. Teaching assistants now have clearer learning roles and in the best lessons help record the progress that pupils make. A good example is the use of 'post-it' notes on a 'learning wall' in one of the classrooms.

Sometimes the language that is used in lessons by adults confuses pupils. Staff need to be updated in the subject-specific language to use in order to aid learning, particularly in numeracy and literacy.

Most teaching assistants now have a dedicated break from the pupils. However, pupils often do not have a break from being with their teachers at lunchtimes. This hinders their levels of independence and does not help them to understand the difference between lessons and recreation.

Judgement

Progress since the section 5 inspection areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of lesson planning – satisfactory progress
- extend the curriculum by increasing teaching and learning opportunities through shortened break and lunchtimes and ensuring that additional activities are focused on increasing pupils' achievement – satisfactory progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

All of the senior leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and are working well together to drive improvement. There is a clear sense of purpose and direction in the school and it is on track to meet the targets in the school's improvement plan. Self-evaluation is accurate as increased monitoring has identified the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. Follow-up action has been taken and there are realistic plans to provide further support and challenge where necessary. The staff are responding well to this clarity of direction and clear expectations. As a result, there has been improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. The school should consider other aspects of its work where a consistent approach could aid learning.

Teachers are more accountable for the progress of the pupils and there is a heightened awareness throughout the school community of pupils' academic learning. All staff are being supported to understand and are beginning to use data information more effectively to help measure and improve progress. Governors too are increasing their understanding of the reasons for the pupils' previous lack of progress. Governors and staff carry out their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils and ensuring the care and welfare of pupils very well. They have not had enough discrete training relating to special school data to help them to challenge the school's work as part of their monitoring role.

It is still early days as the leadership changes only took place in November; however, visitors, staff and members of the governing body comment on improvements and, certainly, despite the long way to go, there is a sense that the school is 'up for' for the challenge.

Judgement

Progress since the section 5 inspection areas for improvement:

Develop the roles of all senior staff to bring about effective support for the school's improvement and improving pupils' achievement – satisfactory progress.

External support

The action plan provided by the local authority meets requirements and is being followed through effectively.