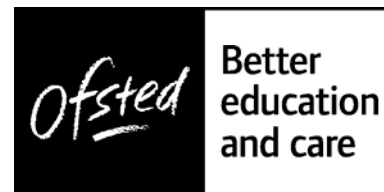


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18 July 2005

Ms R Johnson
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Dear Ms Johnson

Implementation of Cantell School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Pauline Robins HMI, Louise Soden HMI, Andrew Olive HMI, and Michael Pipes, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 July 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Children's Services Director of Education for Southampton. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF CANTELL SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit 46 lessons or parts of lessons, seven registration sessions and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair and vice-chair of governors and identified members of staff. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

Assessment and target setting are being developed on a sound basis; they are satisfactory and increasingly consistent. Good use is being made of standardised and commercial tests to assess attainment and progress. A useful database exists to inform target setting at individual and whole-school level, and provides the teachers with clear records of the attainment of the pupils in their class or set. The recent appointment of a non-teaching examination and assessment officer, with good support and guidance from the LEA, is ensuring that decisions and actions are based on robust data. Assessment for learning has been a focus of staff meetings and is now beginning to be used to predict progress and set challenging targets. However, this is not yet reflected consistently in the marking of the pupils' work, too much of which is cursory and judgemental rather than developmental. The use of assessment to inform planning is at a very early stage of development. Though teachers were seen discussing with the pupils the levels of the work they were doing, the impact on planning for the range of pupils' prior attainment and understanding was weak. There are indications that some of the teachers' and departments' assessments of the pupils' attainment are inaccurate. For example, the unvalidated 2005 Key Stage 3 test results in science are significantly better than the teacher assessments.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 41 of the 46 lessons. It was unsatisfactory in four and poor in one; it was good in 15 and very good in two. This is an improvement since the last monitoring visit. However, overall there is less good teaching than seen nationally and too little to secure the good progress necessary to address the pupils' underachievement.

The teaching was most effective when the planning identified specific learning objectives that were explained clearly to the pupils and referred to throughout the lesson. The activities were well chosen, motivating the pupils and catering successfully for the range of ability and learning styles. The teachers demonstrated an enthusiasm and impressive depth of knowledge in their subject and had high expectations of what the pupils could achieve. On-going assessment was used effectively to adapt these lessons to consolidate and extend the pupils' understanding as appropriate, and ensure a brisk pace of learning. There were examples of good, open questioning that was targeted at particular groups of

pupils to probe and extend their understanding. The relationships between the staff and the pupils were warm and encouraging, promoting supportive attitudes between the pupils.

Some of the lessons that were satisfactory overall contained significant weaknesses. The lesson objectives were too general or based on activities without regard to what the pupils needed to learn. The teachers' expectations of the pupils were too low. Lesson-planning was inadequate for the range of ability in the class. Despite identifying three different levels of expected outcomes, the work the pupils were asked to do was rarely differentiated and the higher attaining pupils in particular were not suitably challenged. The on-going assessment was insufficiently focused to enable the teacher or the pupils to assess the progress that had been made. As a result there was little oral feedback to move the pupils on and only occasional adaptation of the lesson planning.

The use made of teaching assistants was inconsistent. At best, the purpose of the lesson was shared effectively, their role throughout the lesson was clear and they were able to make a positive contribution to the progress of the pupils with whom they were working. On other occasions, little thought had been given to exploiting their presence.

In the unsatisfactory and poor lessons, the teachers' planning was weak and there were insufficient challenge and pace. The teachers' subject knowledge was inadequate and the modelling and exposition were poor. There were examples of the repetitive use of ineffective behaviour management strategies.

The quality of learning closely matched the quality of teaching. It was satisfactory or better in 40 lessons and good or better in 15. The best learning was seen in the lessons where there was a clear sense of purpose and the teachers employed strategies that actively engaged the pupils in their work. In three lessons where the teaching was satisfactory or better, the learning was inhibited by the inadequate attitudes and receptiveness of the pupils.

Despite some modest improvement in attendance, the overall rate remains well below the national figure. Attendance in Year 7 has been maintained at over 91 per cent throughout the year, but the figure declines for each year group, reaching only 82.7 per cent for Year 11. The poor attendance of girls in this year group is a particular concern.

The school's response to improving attendance has been thorough and thoughtful, building carefully on the outcomes of the last monitoring visit. A useful database has been established, providing information at individual pupil level. This data can be interrogated for different groups of pupils, allowing patterns and trends to be identified so that appropriate interventions can be planned. The school is confident that the current information on attendance is accurate. Plans are well advanced for the school to take part in a pilot, using fixed-penalty notices for the most serious cases of non-attendance.

The attendance task group has made a good contribution to establishing a consistent approach to all aspects of attendance and punctuality. The use of an external service to pursue truancy has been cost effective and efficient. Three corridor patrol assistants have been appointed; their work is contributing to a significant reduction in internal truancy. During this visit, no pupil was seen out of lessons without an official pass. The attendance officer has successfully rationalised the system for working with individual pupils by liaising with each year head prior to meeting with the education welfare officer. Monitoring of the pupils causing concern is consistent. The LEA has provided further support through the appointment of an additional welfare officer.

The task group is rightly thinking broadly about all aspects of attendance, recognising that the curriculum must motivate the pupils and offer them an opportunity to succeed. Assemblies have been designed to provide a more engaging start to the day, encouraging the pupils to arrive at school punctually. The reward system is valued by the pupils.

There has been a marked improvement in the pupils' behaviour, both in lessons and around the school. Behaviour was satisfactory or better in 40 of the 46 lessons, including 19 where it was good or very good. The pupils have responded positively to the code of conduct, which was launched recently. The expectations of the pupils' approach are displayed around the school and there is a growing consistency in the teachers' management of behaviour. The poor behaviour, which was a feature of the previous visit, was rarely seen, although a minority of pupils continue to present complex challenges. The pupils report that behaviour has improved and the younger ones comment on feeling safer in school.

These improvements are beginning to build a more positive climate for learning; however, the pupils' attitudes to their learning lag some way behind the gains in behaviour. Too many pupils arrive at lessons without the necessary equipment, homework is not completed consistently and few pupils take pride in the presentation of their work or the care and organisation of their folders. The pupils in Year 10 did not take their responsibility to complete coursework seriously.

The school consistently collates and analyses records of misbehaviour, vandalism and racial incidents. In addition, the use of the on-call system is scrutinised daily. The information is used well to guide further developments. An innovative approach to the leadership and management of year groups has been adopted for September 2005. A team of five non-teaching staff has been recruited, providing a consistent point of reference for any incident throughout the day.

There has been one permanent exclusion for the period between March and June 2005. Detailed records are kept of fixed-term exclusions and patterns have been identified. A system has been established to identify and support those pupils identified as being at risk of exclusion.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the actions which need to be taken to secure improvement. Monitoring and evaluation processes are more rigorous and there is greater consistency in their application. The outcomes of the school's monitoring were similar to the findings of HMI during this visit. The new deputy headteacher has already made a positive contribution to the school, particularly in developing the leadership of the mathematics department. Both deputies offer a good level of support to the headteacher and are developing into an effective team. They provide a clear educational direction and purpose for the work of the school. Appropriate action has been taken to address weaknesses at senior and middle management level, though this is an ongoing process. There remains inconsistency in the quality of leadership and management at middle management level and a key post in the English department is unfilled for September.

The governors continue to work closely with the school. The chair of governors meets regularly with the headteacher and has been able to offer support through some difficult times. The governors are growing in confidence and beginning to be proactive in their roles as link governors. They now have a protocol in place to help them conduct visits to the school in an appropriate manner and training has taken place to support this. The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of two experienced LEA governors and a third from industry. An LEA presence at all meetings has been valuable in supporting the governors through more complex issues and in identifying their training needs.

The concept of the specialist schools status is to be relaunched at the beginning of the next academic year. There is recognition, by the senior managers, that staff and pupils do not yet fully understand the implications of being a specialist school and how the designation can support them in raising standards. Although fully staffed with specialists, there remain challenging staffing issues in both mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) departments. However, new and promising appointments have been made for the start of the next academic year. A positive climate for learning is gradually being established throughout the school and this is providing a solid foundation from which the two departments can begin to grow. There is evidence of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning within the maths department. However, there is no discernible impact of ICT helping to raise standards across the school or supporting learning in the wider curriculum.

The LEA is providing a satisfactory level of support through the work of various curriculum consultants and the school's adviser. Monitoring of progress against the action plan has provided developmental feedback to the school. The school's adviser meets regularly with the headteacher to provide pastoral support in addition to his monitoring role.

The pace of improvement has begun to accelerate. Plans and proposals are being efficiently implemented in line with the action plan and are expected to bear fruit in

the next academic year. After a halting start the school is building the capacity to drive the necessary improvement.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: establish a clear behaviour management policy, applied consistently by all staff, with mechanisms for dealing with bullying and for adequate staff supervision during breaks and lunchtimes

The school has agreed a behaviour policy to provide a context for the code of conduct. The improvements in the pupils' behaviour have been discussed above. There is much greater consistency in the teachers' application of the code of conduct and their expectations of what the pupils can achieve is growing.

Progress is reasonable.

2: improve effectiveness of monitoring, particularly of maths, science and ICT, to raise achievement

There has been an improvement in the rigour and pace of the senior team's work to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The comprehensive programme of monitoring has given them a very accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching across the school. A suitable range of professional development has been arranged for the teachers, the intensity and focus of which is aimed at their specific needs. Support from within the school and the LEA is used effectively to support and challenge teachers at all level of expertise.

Progress is good.

3: strengthen leadership, management and governance, so that all in the school community are working towards clear, common goals

Under the strong and determined leadership of the headteacher, the senior team has become increasingly effective. There is now the capacity within the team to lead the school through the next stage of development. The pace of change has increased and is beginning to have the desired effect.

Progress is reasonable.

4: deal with attendance and truancy issues by applying current policies systematically and rigorously

The school has reformulated the attendance policy, clarifying how improved attendance will be achieved. The further actions which have been taken are discussed above. The school has made good progress with setting up appropriate procedures to improve attendance; however, the rate of attendance remains very low and the impact of the actions taken is limited.

5: develop the systems of assessment so that information is used to help pupils raise standards

Robust systems for collecting, collating and disseminating data are now in place, and useful information is being produced to influence decisions and actions. The impact on raising standards is still at an early stage of development.

Progress is reasonable.

6: ensure requirements for the teaching and learning of ICT and religious education are met. Ensure that teachers have necessary information about pupils' special educational needs. Provide a daily act of collective worship

Progress was not fully evaluated during this visit.