

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

T 020 8313 7760
F 020 8464 3393

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045



16 December 2005

Mrs Ruth Johnson
The Headteacher
Cantell School
Violet Road
Bassett
Southampton
Hampshire
SO16 3GJ

Dear Mrs Johnson

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CANTELL SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Glynis Bradley-Peat AI, Alison Thomson AI, Michael Pipes AI and Michael Pye AI to your school on 7 and 8 December 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2004.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, chair of governors, selected members of senior and middle management, pupils and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit the local authority (LA) has applied to the DfES to create an interim executive board (IEB). This process is still under discussion. Positive and effective staff appointments have been made. These have increased the capacity of the senior leadership team and created five posts for non teaching heads

of year. Despite attracting good applicants for senior posts there remains an issue for the recruitment of appropriately qualified and competent staff at other levels.

Achievement and standards

In 2005, the school's results at Key Stage 4 were the highest for five years. Although still below the national average, 42% of the pupils gained 5 or more A*-C at GCSE, representing a 5% overall improvement on the previous year. There has been an 8% rise in the percentage of students gaining a GCSE in maths and a 20% rise in ICT. The school's results at Key Stage 3 do not mirror the rise seen at Key Stage 4. English, maths and science all show a decrease in the number of pupils attaining the expected level or above compared to the previous year.

Personal development and well-being

Overall, the personal development of the pupils is satisfactory. Many of the pupils work hard and achieve well. The attitude of most pupils to the school and their work is improving. However, their exercise books show too little pride in their work. The pupils say that they are now enjoying school and feel that they are making progress. They commented particularly on the recent improvement in behaviour and a reduction in bullying and minor scuffles in the corridors and on the playgrounds. There is now a mechanism for the senior pupils to be involved in disciplinary procedures. The higher attaining Year 11 pupils are optimistic about their chances of good grades at GCSE and have received good advice about their continuing education. There are good arrangements for the oversight of vulnerable pupils; they and other pupils at risk of disaffection have responded well to the efforts of the inclusion manager and year heads to provide a range of learning experiences relevant to their needs. There is a good system for arranging individual education programmes, including effective, staged reintegration strategies for those with a poor attendance record.

Attendance remains well below the normal expectation. Systems for monitoring are rigorously applied but the very poor attendance of a significant minority, in each year group, adversely affects the overall figures. Punctuality, in the morning, remains an issue to be resolved. Too many pupils treat the morning registration session of 20 minutes as an arrival interval, even though they are marked late after the teacher has taken the register. The pupils' attitudes to punctuality, including moving between lessons, is too casual. There are improved systems for patrolling corridors and internal truancy has been reduced significantly.

There have been significantly fewer exclusions recently, from over 400 pupil days lost in the autumn term last year to just over half that figure (250 days) this term.

There is good awareness of safety and healthy lifestyle issues, for instance in the school meal provision. The school is now extending its contribution to the community, with the first public performance of a musical show for many years. A draft policy for collective worship and guidelines for tutors has been written, built around a theme for the week. The assembly seen met the requirements for

collective worship but there remain inconsistencies in the delivery of the thought for the day in tutor time.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2004:

- Establish a clear behaviour management policy understood by all students and applied consistently by all staff – satisfactory progress
- Raise levels of attendance and stop truancy from lessons by applying current policies systematically and rigorously and checking that they are being followed – satisfactory progress
- Provide a daily act of collective worship – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Careful monitoring of lessons is contributing to an increase in the proportion of good teaching. In the one outstanding lesson, in mathematics, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge ensured pupils were very clear about what they were expected to learn. Through being given responsibility for assessing their own work the pupils learnt about how to improve their work. Learning was encouraged by skilful questioning which demanded that pupils had to think hard. Pupils were motivated by the good pace to the lesson. Where teaching was good elsewhere, careful planning resulted in imaginative starts to lessons which immediately gained pupils' attention. Pupils were able to concentrate and learn because teachers managed their behaviour well.

In three inadequate lessons learning was unsatisfactory largely because of the poor behaviour and attitudes shown by a significant number of pupils. The start to some lessons was delayed by the late arrival of a minority of pupils. Pupils spoke about things unrelated to the lesson, often talking during the teacher's explanation. The lessons lost pace and pupils became increasingly restless. The objectives of the lessons were insufficiently focused to hold pupils' attention, and infrequently referred to by teachers.

The school takes good care of its pupils. It provides them with sound, and often good support. In Year 7 for example all pupils have a peer mentor to help them when they first join the school.

The school has appointed a good range of managers who oversee the care, support and guidance of pupils. The recent appointment of non-teaching Year Leaders has contributed well to improving pupils' behaviour through developing links with parents. Learning coordinators now oversee the academic progress of pupils. However, it is too early for the full effect of these appointments to be identified although they have been very positively received at a number of levels. There is good advice to pupils at the end of Year 11 about their future career or further education choices. It is less effective at the end of Year 9 when pupils consider their subject options.

There are rigorous procedures for child protection in place, and all staff have received refresher training. Risks which might arise from school trips or journeys are carefully evaluated.

The school continues to build on the sound development of its assessment and target setting. A comprehensive data base is accessible to all staff and departments are encouraged to share information with each other and with the pupils. Minimum targets are set for the pupils in each subject and at the end of the key stages. Further targets are being set for pupils for whom extra challenge is thought to be appropriate. The introduction of academic review days and progress clinics to discuss pupils' targets, has involved parents and carers more fully in the pupils' education. Assessment is a continuing focus for staff in the planning of lessons, to set realistic, but challenging targets. However, assessment is still not reflected consistently in the marking of the students' work. Marking was found to be patchy and often does not inform the pupils how to progress. There was some evidence seen in lessons of teachers matching work to particular grades or levels, but this was mainly at a whole class level, rather than with individual pupils. There is particularly good practice in the maths department where vulnerable pupils are identified and their progress tracked by an intervention coordinator. Here, teacher assessments have been found to be accurate, but this accuracy has not been consistent in every department.

There are some issues with the school's curriculum which have been recognised and senior managers are in the process of refining plans for improvement. Questions have been raised about whether individual pupils are selecting the best options to maximise the school's results at Key Stage 4 and guidance is not yet good enough. However, arrangements are in place for those students who struggle to cope with the demands of a full curriculum and they are offered college placements on a part-time basis. Although the school has links with local colleges, these are not yet effective enough to direct pupils towards more appropriate courses. In addition to this, careers education has not been built into the curriculum rigorously enough to meet the needs of the pupils. The extra-curricular activities offered by the school are extensive and present opportunities for pupils to excel. These include a variety of activities, instrumental lesson scheme, and a variety of sporting activities.

Specialist school status is beginning to have some impact within the school and results have improved this year in mathematics and ICT at Key Stage 4. The leadership and management of mathematics are now good and the new head of ICT has identified appropriate areas for future development. These middle managers are beginning to understand how the designation can support them in raising standards. However, although ICT ensures that statutory requirements for the delivery of the curriculum are met, it does not contribute sufficiently to the pupils' learning in other subjects. There is a lack of equipment in some classrooms which impacts on the development of pupils' research skills, as a result, activities planned by teachers are, by necessity being conducted outside the classroom or at home.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2004:

- Develop the existing system for students' assessment so that information is used to help students achieve higher standards – satisfactory progress
- Ensure that teachers have the necessary information about students' special educational needs – satisfactory progress
- Ensure the requirements for the teaching and learning of ICT and religious education are met – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of senior managers are good. The head teacher's leadership team (HTLT) share a vision for the future of the school, based on clear educational direction which is focussed on teaching and learning and managing change. They know what a good school should look like and rightly aspire to provide provision of high quality. The headteacher has an eye for detail and this is reflected in her drive for high standards in every aspect of school life. Her determination to drive forward the school improvement agenda is recognised throughout the school, including by the pupils who spoke positively about the improvements she has brought about since her appointment. The HTLT are united and act as good role models throughout the school.

The headteacher has the ability to recognise the strengths of her team and utilise these to good effect. The appointment of a business manager and additional management for the special educational needs (SEN) team, together with additional assistant heads joining the team in January and Easter has significantly increased capacity. Senior managers are now able to be more reflective and strategic in their work and make informed decisions based on the needs of learners.

Senior managers have carried out an accurate process of self evaluation and have prioritised areas for development. This is a clear indication of the schools capacity to improve as the headteacher was able to delegate much of the coordination of this process to the deputy head, who then involved the heads of department.

Leadership and management at middle leader level remain variable. There are strengths in mathematics and emerging improvements in humanities. The monitoring, evaluation and review process is now embedded within the school. Subject leaders are starting to monitor teaching and learning; this is helping them understand the quality of provision and their role in bringing about improvements.

Governors continue to devote a great deal of time to supporting the school. They are kept well informed of developments and issues but are not always able to recognise and prioritise the school's key strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement committee has been appropriately restructured. The chair of governors recognises that the needs of the pupils must come first and supports the proposal for forming an IEB.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2004:

- Strengthen overall leadership, management and governance, so that all in the school community are working towards clear goals – good progress
- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring teaching and learning, particularly of Maths, Science and ICT in order to raise achievement – good progress

External support

The local authority is providing an appropriate level of support, the emphasis of which has shifted over the past term to give the school more control over developments. Support is now better focussed on teaching and learning rather than pastoral. The school continues to need an increased level of support to address some of the remaining issues with regard to special educational needs provision and attendance.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- The strategy for assessment, which is in place, needs to be used and applied consistently in the classroom to improve pupils learning
- The SEN action plan should be implemented with a degree of urgency
- Continue to develop clear, expectations of behaviour, which are consistently applied by all staff, throughout the school but particularly at KS 3
- Extend the skills, knowledge and understanding of ICT across other curriculum areas

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Children's Services Director of Education for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins
H M Inspector