



9 March 2006

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

Dear Mrs Johnson

## **SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CANTELL SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Patricia Walker AI, Marianne Young AI, Michael Milton AI, Olson Davis AI and Sheila Nolan (on behalf of the DfES), to your school on 1 and 2 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

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

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### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the leadership team, selected members of staff, pupils, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the Local Authority (LA).

### **Context**

An IEB has now been formed. This is in the early stages having met for the first time the day before the monitoring visit. The capacity of the senior management team has been strengthened further; an additional assistant head took up his post in January and a further two appointments have been

made for the summer term. Three important appointments to subject leaders have been made for the summer term in English, personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) and Special Educational Needs.

### **Achievement and standards**

Standards are below the national average despite an increase in the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A\*-C at GCSE in 2005. Standards declined at Key Stage 3 and are below the national average. Trends in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) show a year-on-year improvement. Boys make better progress than girls. The school found the recent internal assessments in Years 9 and 11 encouraging. Double the percentage of pupils in Year 11 achieved 5\* A-C grades at GCSE compared with the previous year. In Year 9, maths and science departments came close to achieving their targets at level 5 and there were good results at level 6 and above in both subjects. The English results were within 5% of the target, an improvement on last year's results.

The continuing sound development of the school's assessment and target setting procedures has been given added impetus with the appointment of an assistant headteacher with this responsibility. An examinations and assessment officer has also been appointed. They have improved the planning and coordination of assessment activities. This has alleviated some of the inconsistencies in practice between teachers and departments. The comprehensive database now contains more information such as links to the pupils' individual education plans (IEPs). As a result, teachers are more aware of the learning needs of individuals. Assessment information is easily accessible through the ICT network. This makes it easier for teachers to share the minimum targets set for each pupil in their subjects and to chart their progress. However, assessment information is not effectively analysed or summarised to allow teachers to know how well subjects or particular groups of pupils are doing in relation to national standards.

### **Personal development and well-being**

The personal development of pupils is satisfactory. Most pupils are attentive and eager to do well, taking an interest in their own progress. However, when the pace of the lesson is slow or the delivery lacks stimulation, too many pupils easily become distracted. There is a clear code of conduct for pupils, which has a high profile in the school, but records indicate that each day there are pupils who have to be removed from their lessons because they are unable to conform.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is generally satisfactory and the school has a calm and safe atmosphere. The pupils themselves comment on the fact that behaviour has improved markedly and that they feel well protected. They know that there are adults they can approach with their concerns and that they will be listened to and their problems dealt with. One pupil said, 'there are quite a few staff who will always be on your side when things go wrong.' The pupils feel that although bullying has decreased it still exists, a view with which the school concurs. Although detailed records are kept of each complaint of bullying and how it was resolved, there are no records kept of overall trends in this problem. As a result, there is little concrete evidence of whether it is declining. Some pupils' behaviour tends to be very boisterous when they are playing ball games in a restricted space, they lack the self control to play sensibly and avoid potentially dangerous situations.

The school has introduced several additional measures to improve attendance since the previous monitoring visit and have appreciated the support which they are now being given by the local authority. Significant amongst these are the setting of individual targets for each pupil with attendance below 90% and completion of the lengthy preparations to introduce fixed penalties for irregular attendance. At present the school monitors the rate of post registration truancy by the number of pupils who are caught avoiding lessons. Because of the diversity of provision to meet the needs of all pupils, it is very difficult for the school to get an accurate picture of this kind of truancy. Despite all the schools efforts to raise attendance, the figures remain stubbornly well below the national average.

Each year group attends one assembly each week. The assembly observed during the visit, although delivering a strong moral and social message, offered no opportunities for reflection. The 'thought for the day' system is used inconsistently by tutors.

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

- Raise levels of attendance and stop truancy from lessons by applying current policies systematically and rigorously and check that they are being followed – good progress in putting measures in place but has yet to show impact
- Establish a clear behaviour management policy, understood by all students and applied consistently by all staff – good progress in terms of understanding but some inconsistencies in application still apply
- Provide a daily act of collective worship - satisfactory

Progress on the area for development identified by the last monitoring visit in December 2005:

- Continue to develop clear expectations with regard to attitudes and behaviour which are consistently applied by all staff, throughout the school, but particularly at Key Stage 3 - satisfactory

## Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and showing improvement. Senior managers make accurate judgements when observing lessons and know that some teaching and learning is not good enough. Inspectors agree with the school's assessment. In the best lessons, pupils understand what they have to learn and all pupils are given work that challenges and interests them. Pupils respond well, their attitudes are positive and they do their best. There are good working relationships between adults and pupils with the latter confident to share their thoughts and learning with their peers. The pupils' understanding of the purpose of the lesson is carefully monitored and regular assessment helps them to progress and achieve well. In some lessons teachers make good use of the interactive white boards to model tasks so that pupils' attention and focus is maintained and they understand what they are expected to do. Questioning ensures that pupils learn how to explain and develop their answers using appropriate technical vocabulary. In an outstanding history lesson, the very good quality of working relationships and the challenging work that engaged all pupils ensured that they thought for themselves and used knowledge from previous lessons effectively.

Where lessons are less effective, teachers' plans list a range of activities which do not build sufficiently on pupils' previous learning. The teachers talk for too long and give insufficient time for pupils to ask questions or make a contribution. Behaviour and attitudes are unsatisfactory and occasionally poor during these lessons, with pupils allowed to be passive and distracted. Teachers are too tolerant of low-level disruption and chatter from some pupils. The start to some lessons is slow with pupils having to wait for all the class to arrive before learning begins. As a result lesson time is lost and pupils do not make the progress expected of them.

Students are becoming increasingly aware of what they need to do to progress towards their targets. This is through useful information displayed in classrooms and initiatives such as the 'learning mountain'. Assessment for learning is a continuing focus, with greater clarity of learning objectives and expectations within lessons. Inconsistencies remain in the quality of feedback given by teachers in lessons. In good lessons, pupils are given very clear and accurate advice about what they need to do to improve. The quality of marking is also inconsistent. In many cases comments are not developmental and there are few opportunities for pupils to reflect upon and respond to advice. The progress clinics are well attended and help parents to appreciate

how best to support their children's learning. Reports to parents show clearly how pupils are achieving in relation to national standards. Teachers analyse the national test papers to identify areas of weakness. This has resulted in intervention programmes in mathematics and science for targeted pupils. The impact of this initiative on pupils' results has yet to be seen.

Based on an accurate process of self evaluation, the school has made changes to the curriculum for the forthcoming academic year. By widening the choice of vocational options at Key Stage 4 the school hopes to meet the needs of all its pupils. Working in partnership with training providers, the school will be able to offer courses, on site, which are of greater appeal to girls. The school has rightly identified a large proportion of this group as being at highest risk of becoming disengaged with the current offer. Good improvements have also been made to the provision of enterprise education and to 'catch-up' provision for pupils who enter the school with low attainment in literacy and numeracy. Satisfactory improvements have been made to the provision for PSHCE and further significant improvements are being planned with the appointment of specialist staff after Easter. In several subjects, good progress has been made in using ICT to enhance pupils' learning. There is some effective extra-curricular provision based in the library for vulnerable pupils.

The effectiveness of non-teaching year leaders and the Key Stage learning co-ordinators has continued to develop. Improved guidance for pupils in Year 9, when choosing their core and option subjects for Year 10, is now in place.

By engaging pupils in a calm and orderly environment, away from the school site, the satellite provision is effective in maintaining the reduction in fixed term and permanent exclusions. The school recognises the need to implement more rigorous monitoring of academic progress and attendance of these pupils to aid their smooth transition back into lessons at the appropriate time. The school would benefit from additional support to guarantee the sustainability and development of this resource.

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 requirements for the teaching and learning of ICT and religious education are met – now met and no longer an area for development
- Ensure that teachers have the necessary information about pupils' special educational needs – satisfactory progress

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the last monitoring visit in December 2005:

- The strategy for assessment that is in place, needs to be used and applied in the classroom to improve pupils' learning – satisfactory progress
- Ensure that specialist computer technology is available throughout the school and extend the skills, knowledge and understanding of ICT across other curriculum areas – good progress

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management at the senior level remain good and have the capacity to improve still further. The headteacher's very good leadership continues to provide a clear direction for the school; she leads and manages change well. The Head Teacher's Leadership Team (HTLT) has acted effectively on the comments made by HMI in previous monitoring letters. The HTLT are now in a position to be reflective rather than reactive as the school is calm and better organised. This has resulted in a more sustained impact on the long term strategic planning. One of the strengths of the headteacher is her ability to recognise and make best use of the strengths of her staff. This is exemplified in the roles of the HTLT and short term measures, which have been put in place to maintain the SEN provision.

The role of middle managers as leaders is improving. However, there remain some inconsistencies. The quality of teaching and learning frequently reflects this inconsistency in departments. Not all middle managers yet understand their roles in whole school improvement. There is a rigorous and well documented process of departmental review supported by good senior team line management. HTLT has a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and appropriate actions have been taken to address weaknesses. There is a well organised programme of training some of which is currently focussed on behaviour management. The school sets out to empower staff. They successfully use a training model which takes existing good practice and use this to support and develop other staff.

The IEB is now in place. It has identified areas for development and has a strategic view of the school for the next three years. The chair understands the fundamentals of school management and that teaching and learning should be at the core of any future developments. He also understands how to challenge the school appropriately and ask the questions which will keep the board abreast of developments. He recognises that when special measures are removed, this is just the first step in a longer term strategy to becoming a good school.

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 effectiveness of monitoring, particularly of mathematics, science and ICT, to raise achievement – good progress

## **External support**

The LA is providing good support, particularly in facilitating the appointment of an IEB. There is a well thought out plan to provide training, especially around behavioural and classroom management issues. The strategic monitoring of the school's progress against the action plan is good.

## **Main Judgements**

Progress since being subject to special measures – good progress

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory progress

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- To develop systems which enable the rate of post registration truancy to be monitored comprehensively and accurately

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Head of Learning Services for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins  
**H M Inspector**