

Cambridge Education
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01223 578500
Direct F 01223 578501
risp.inspections@camb-ed.com



21 October 2008

Mr M Smith
Headteacher
Sheredes School
Cock Lane
Hoddesdon
Hertfordshire
EN11 8JY

Dear Mr Smith,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sheredes School

Following my visit with Antony O'Malley HMI, Lynne Kauffman, Peter Jones and Kenneth Thomas Additional Inspectors, to your school on 1 and 2 October, 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 March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 governors and the Director of Children, Schools and Families for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Sheredes School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 October 2008.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the consultant headteacher, nominated staff, groups of students, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school is fully staffed and has not needed to appoint overseas trained staff for the first time in a number of years. The new head of English took up post at the start of the academic year. An experienced head of mathematics has been appointed for January 2009 as a result of the strong partnership arrangements with Dame Alice Owen's School.

Achievement and standards

The school's own analysis of the 2008 provisional results indicates a small rise in the percentage of students achieving the expected levels in all core subjects; however, these figures are likely to remain below the national average.

The outcome of public examinations taken by students aged 16 show some improvement with 52% of students attaining 5A*- C passes, with strong results secured by significant numbers of students in English literature and food technology. The 2008 provisional data indicates that the gap between the proportions of students achieving a higher grade in mathematics compared to English language has narrowed. Results in English language 42%, were just above those for mathematics where a 40% pass rate was secured. The proportion of students achieving five higher grades at GCSE that included English and mathematics remains below 30%.

Post 16 results of vocational and advanced level courses show notable improvements in the average points score per student in years 12 and 13 although the performance of Year 13 girls masked the less positive performances of the boys. The weaknesses that occurred in a course provided by a consortia school have been covered and the provision withdrawn; however, outcomes in physical education were disappointing given the strength of this area within the school.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards of attainment and achievement by increasing the academic challenge and engagement provided where outcomes are low – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The action taken to improve the students' attitudes and behaviour is having a positive impact; behaviour management is more consistent and the number of exclusions has fallen significantly. Similarly, the number of occasions when students have been removed from lessons has halved. While the behaviour of boys is improving noticeably a more rapid improvement is being seen in the behaviour of girls. The students' behaviour is satisfactory and often good in both the open areas of the school and lessons. As a result the school is orderly and the atmosphere is conducive to learning. The improvements secured in the quality of teaching are having a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning. In many lessons students show enthusiasm for learning and a willingness to comply with the requests of their teachers.

The students' more positive attitudes are also reflected in the improving rates of attendance. These rose by two percent in the last academic year to a level which is close to the national average. Students are more punctual at the start of the day and at the beginning of lessons. The recently introduced electronic registration system is proving to be highly effective in supporting these improvements and progress in this aspect is good. The rising attendance rate is a reflection of the effectiveness of the school's strategies to identify and support particular students whose absence causes concern, a very small number of whom contribute to most of the school's unauthorised absence.

Quality of provision

There has been a significant improvement in learning and teaching since the section 5 inspection. Teachers are very positive about the external support from their partner school, the collaboration with the LA and the enabling approach of the new management teams in opening up the whole debate on improving learning.

During this inspection 42 lessons were visited by inspectors and just over half were judged to be good or better although learning was inadequate in three. Generally, teachers' good subject knowledge lends confidence to their teaching styles. The significant improvements secured in lesson planning and delivery, combined with a strong management focus on the quality of learning has improved the performance of every subject faculty. The learning needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other groups of learners are matched well to tasks particularly in literacy and numeracy. There is growing confidence in the use of data to identify need and to plan the next stage of learning, but this is still inconsistent across the school. Particularly well-structured in-house professional development highlights relevant issues and engages all staff through coaching sessions derived on best practice.

Outstanding lessons; for example, in food technology, facilitated independence and personal development, encouraged reflective learning, and the application of basic skills. Good lessons have a lively and engaging starter, maintain the pace of learning have high expectations of achievement and behaviour and engage students in their own learning. For example, in a French lesson quick-fire, random questions in the target language challenged students' thinking, kept them on the edge of their seats and sustained the pace of learning. Some teachers made good use of the 'even better if' comments, in their marking to boost self-esteem and guide improvement. One mathematics students remarked, "I like the comments at the bottom of my work because they tell me how I can get better."

In satisfactory lessons students although compliant could not always see the purpose of the activity and some quickly lost interest when the pace of the lesson declined. In some lessons a scrutiny of students' books revealed erratic marking that failed to guide future learning. On some occasions teachers spent too long instructing the students and this placed constraints on learning. The weakest lessons were characterised by a lack of appropriate challenge that failed to address the gaps in students' subject knowledge and core skills that related to previous weakness in their education.

Teaching assistants, when available, were having a considerable impact on learning. Some classes benefit from the presence of sixth-form students who offer their support as part of their community service commitments.

The planned curriculum improvements were introduced successfully at the start of the academic year and courses now meet the learning needs of students at Key Stage 4. BTEC courses in business, learning to learning and physical education now provide progression pathways through to the school's BTEC National post-16 provision in these subjects. Other courses at this level in performing arts and dance give access to qualifications at Key Stage 4 for a greater range of students. Improvement of provision in languages at Key Stage 3, including the introduction of Spanish, has led to a greater enjoyment of language learning. Contrary to national trends, uptake at Key Stage 4 of languages has risen significantly. A small number of students from both Key Stage 3 and 4 have gained a GCSE in a community language. The introduction of three different routes for science gives the school more scope to meet the learning needs of students of differing abilities and aptitudes.

The introduction this year of post-16 BTEC physical education and business courses provides an assessment model better suited to students' needs. Courses in photography and psychology attract significant numbers of students from the local consortium schools. The school has plans to offer the new creative and media diploma level course from September 2009 on behalf of the consortia.

Sixth form students are successfully guided towards independent study skills. They are timetabled for at least two hours each day and are monitored by staff, in either the library or a computer room and as a result students are developing increasing independence and self-confidence. The practical emphasis of new courses introduced this year has helped to develop these characteristics. The school has introduced regular and frequent academic mentoring of students by designated staff, using individual pupil performance data, target-setting and progress monitoring.

The school is continuing to improve the use of assessment data to build a sharper picture of how well departments and students are performing. Regular assessments take place at fixed points throughout the academic year. The outcomes are analysed rigorously by both subject and faculty leaders. These analyses have strengthened the systems of accountability in the school. Subject leaders produce curriculum response documents that are in turn the subject of professional discussions at accountability meetings. At present, these meetings focus on student progress and very clearly identify how well individuals are meeting expected progress targets. The school is at present using the data less effectively to investigate aspects of the provision that lead to particularly good or inadequate progress.

The rigorous tracking of students' progress results in the appropriate identification of underachievement. All data gathered is shared with teachers, students and parents so that progress towards annual and key stage targets is transparent and discussed between all parties. The school recognises the inconsistencies between departments and these relate to variations in the staff's understanding of national curriculum and examination board criteria. In over half of the lessons observed outstanding and good use of assessment was evident. Students are making better progress because teachers are increasingly using assessment information to match activities in lessons to their students' needs.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school to match that of the most successful departments – good.
- Improve the facilities for independent study in the sixth form – good.
- Bring the planned development of Assessment for Learning forward rapidly – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

A restructured senior and middle management team is now in place and good mentoring procedures utilise the strength of the outstanding partnership arrangements. The leadership and management of the school have improved

significantly to the point where there is a sustainable dynamic to their work and greater consistency between departments. The school has all of the elements of the National Challenge raising achievement plan in place.

The headteacher was invited to join the inspection team to work alongside HMI. He contributed to all discussions and conducted joint observations with each inspector. Previous opportunities to work alongside inspectors have enabled other senior managers to draw up a particularly strong professional development programme agreed with all staff.

The curriculum leadership provided by the effective performing arts faculty has played a positive role in the improvement of teaching and learning. The collection of departments in this area has secured Arts Mark Gold Status, is leading consortia developments on related diploma strands and is preparing to bid for specialist school status.

Good leadership and management decisions have led to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and the school's evaluation of provision continues to be realistic. The strategic reorganisation of the school day and introduction of electronic registration has significantly improved attendance and punctuality.

Governance continues to hold the school to account effectively; succession planning and policy review are good.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Remove the inconsistencies in the quality of middle management by mirroring the good practice found in successful departments – good.
- Ensure that governors and senior managers address the improvements required with urgency and strategic vision – good.

External support

The LA negotiated and supported partnership arrangements with Dame Alice Owen's School and the work of LA consultants continue to provide excellent support for all aspects of the school's development. This support has focussed on the quality of provision and this has helped to build sustainable improvements. The worthy but basic level diagnosis and prescription work required by the National Strategies is absorbing valuable leadership resources. The school is at the point when educational developments after 'special measures' need to be planned for in order to secure the sustainability of the acceptable educational provision recently achieved as a result of considerable effort by all concerned.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the arrangements for early entry to functional English and mathematics level 2 courses.
- Improve assessment for learning systems to inform the development of the curriculum and the students' understanding of how they can improve.
- Finalise the curriculum decisions required to facilitate an early bid for specialist status when the school emerges from a category of concern.