

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

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



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Mrs Sue Pelham
The Executive Headteacher
Canford Heath Middle School
Learoyd Road
Poole
Dorset
BH17 8PJ

Dear Mrs Pelham

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Canford Heath Middle School

Following my visit with Peter Kemble, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 January, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2008. 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 – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, chair of governors, and the Director of Children's Services for Poole.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Canford Heath Middle School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 January 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and samples of pupils' work, and met with the executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, year leaders, subject leaders, groups of pupils and parents, governors and representatives from the local authority.

Context

A single federated governing body has now been formally established with the first school. Key governors have been appointed, including the chair and two vice chairs: one to link with the first school and one the middle school. The governing body has held its first meeting. The headteacher, who was in the role of consultant headteacher at the last visit, has been appointed as executive headteacher. There have been no changes in teaching staff.

Achievement and standards

More pupils continue to work at levels lower than the expectations for their age than should be the case and inconsistencies in pupils' achievement remain. The main focus of this visit was pupils' progress in Years 5, 6 and 7 in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' progress in Year 4 continues to be satisfactory overall. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has continued to implement procedures for planning and assessing pupils' learning. These are developing greater consistency across the school but have not had enough time to have a clear impact upon raising pupils' standards and accelerating progress. In writing and mathematics, for example, quite a few pupils in Year 6 still have a lot of catching up to do if they are to reach their end of year targets.

There are signs that pupils' standards in reading are improving. A new reading programme has been introduced across the school with improved resources. The school has worked closely with parents and encouraged them to read regularly with their children. Parents find the new home reading records a helpful link with the school. These initiatives have helped to raise the profile of reading and boost pupils' enjoyment of reading books. The most marked improvement has occurred in Years 4, 5 and 6, with slower improvement in Year 7.

A lot of work has gone into improving teachers' knowledge of the current requirements for writing and mathematics and their subject knowledge is steadily developing. Pupils' progress in both writing and mathematics, however, remains too uneven. There are inconsistencies in pupils' progress between year groups and within year groups. For example, in Year 6, pupils' books show better progress in writing in some classes, but not all. In mathematics, where pupils are set by ability

in Years 5, 6 and 7, pupils in higher sets generally make better progress than those in middle and lower sets. This is particularly the case in Years 6 and 7. Science has not, as yet, been a major priority for the school. The coordinators have rightly encouraged teachers to plan more experiments and investigations in lessons and books show that there has been some improvement since September 2008 in all year groups. Standards are lower than they should be because tasks are not matched appropriately to pupils' differing capabilities. Higher attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently nor those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise pupils' achievement and standards, especially in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils behave well and show respect for each other and adults. Pupils enjoy their lessons and try hard to succeed. Their good attitudes are a key factor, even in lessons that are not particularly stimulating. Pupils' concentration and attention in assembly are outstanding. Members of the school council take their responsibilities very seriously and are a mature and engaging group of pupils. Attendance levels are around average but decline as pupils get older. A very small minority of pupils arrive late for school, meaning that they miss vital learning time. The school has recognised this and is taking action to improve attendance and punctuality. Exclusions have declined over the last three years but a few pupils with particularly challenging and disruptive behaviour have been excluded since September 2008.

Quality of provision

The quality of lessons seen during this visit ranged from outstanding to inadequate. Scrutiny of work also reflects this range of quality in teaching and learning. Since the last visit, several aspects of teaching have shown improvement. Lessons are becoming more interesting and motivating. As a result, pupils report that they are enjoying their lessons more. They do not sit for such long periods of time as before and have more opportunities to become engaged in practical and collaborative tasks. Year 6 pupils, for example, responded well when debating whether the school day was too long. Pupils in Year 4 were very adept at working with a friend on multiplication tasks, and Year 5 pupils chatted eagerly as they worked in small groups to identify examples of persuasive writing. More teachers pay attention to monitoring the progress of individuals and groups of pupils during lessons, which helps learning to move on at a better pace. With a few exceptions, teaching assistants are becoming more involved in supporting pupils' learning.

The school has continued to develop a team approach to planning lessons. Teachers mostly share the main learning intentions of the lesson with pupils and, in the more effective lessons, teachers and pupils check learning at the end of the lesson. Nevertheless, inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and learning.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve remain too variable. In Year 7, for instance, not enough is being expected of pupils who are currently working within Level 4 to help them move to Level 5. There are many examples of teachers accepting a low standard of work from pupils whose individual assessments and targets indicate they should be producing work of a much higher standard. In contrast, some teachers expect too much of the lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties. They give them exactly the same list of success criteria to meet as the more able pupils in the class or set and these pupils struggle considerably and underachieve. Whilst teachers are becoming more familiar with their pupils' levels of attainment, few use this knowledge effectively to plan activities that are suitable for the range of capabilities in each class or set. The quality of teachers' marking varies considerably in the help it gives pupils to improve their work. In some classes, marking draws out aspects that the pupils have done well and teachers give clear points for improvement. In others, marking consists of a series of ticks and/or complimentary comments, such as 'well done' or 'great work', without any further detail to help the pupil further. In some pupils' books, too much work is unmarked.

The school has worked hard since the last visit to set up a coherent system for tracking pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Good use has been made of the school's intranet to set up a secure system that all teachers can access easily. Slower progress has been made in setting up a similar system for science. The school has wisely continued to focus on improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Senior leaders and year leaders have more confidence in the accuracy of the recent December assessments and recognise the school is now in a good position to use these to monitor and evaluate pupils' future learning and progress.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning, improving, particularly, the way teachers engage pupils' interest and match learning to their individual needs – satisfactory
- establish a coherent strategy for tracking pupils' progress throughout the school, so that teachers and their assistants can sustain pupils' achievement effectively – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The executive headteacher is continuing to give strong leadership. She and her senior leadership team have built upon the new procedures and initiatives that were being introduced at the last visit. They have focused on the right things and show clear determination to improve consistency and raise expectations. There are some signs of success, but many of the systems and initiatives that have been introduced have not had sufficient time to embed and enable leaders and teachers to demonstrate the impact of their actions on pupils' achievement and standards. The subject leaders for English and mathematics have provided focused advice to support teachers' planning and assessments. Year leaders are developing their roles

and know that they have an important part to play as members of the school improvement team. There is some lack of clarity as to what extent they should oversee standards and progress in their year groups and how this dovetails with the assistant headteachers' roles. Subject leadership in science is developing steadily, although still at an early stage.

The executive headteacher's monitoring of teaching up to now has been focused on developing a good climate for learning across the school. This was an appropriate starting point that has borne fruit. The executive headteacher recognises there is now a need to home in further on the specific strengths and weaknesses in pupils' learning across the ability range. Subject leaders have given valuable support to teachers, through demonstration lessons, but have not had an opportunity to monitor teaching and learning to help teachers identify what could be improved further.

The new governing body is at a very early stage in its work. Nevertheless, governors have a clear understanding of their role in challenging the school. Good progress has been made in setting up appropriate committees and assigning individual roles. The chair of governors has already taken some appropriate steps to enable governors to find out for themselves how well the school is doing in relation to its action plan.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- strengthen leadership and management to make sure strategies introduced to improve provision and lift pupils' achievement are successful – satisfactory.

External support

The school has benefited from good support from governor services which has enabled smooth transition to the new federated governing body. The School Improvement Partner provides good support and challenge for the executive headteacher. Improvements have been made to the school's and local authority's joint action plan since the last visit. It now has sharper success criteria and milestones against which to judge the extent of the school's improvement. The local authority's strategy group met in December to review the school's progress towards coming out of special measures, based on the executive headteacher's evaluation. The minutes of this meeting judge progress to be good and the impact of the local authority's and school's actions are judged to be high against all 17 action points. Many of these judgements are over generous and are not underpinned sufficiently by key evidence. As a result, the group's minutes do not provide governors and senior leaders with a clear enough evaluation of the stage the school has reached and what, in the local authority's view, the school needs to focus on next.