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20 May 2009

Mrs S Pelham
The Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pelham

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Canford Heath Middle School

Following my visit with Fran Ashworth to your school on 12 May 2009, 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 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 be appointed.

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, 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 third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 May 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents and samples of pupils' work in English, mathematics and science. They met with the executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, inclusion leader, science leader, governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the last visit.

Achievement and standards

Focused support and monitoring by senior leaders are bringing about increasing consistency in pupils' achievement. There is some way to go before pupils in all year groups are catching up well and making accelerated progress in order to close the gaps in their past underachievement. The senior leaders have concentrated on ensuring teachers' assessments are accurate so that pupils' progress can be monitored from a secure starting point. The school now has reliable data for all years which show progress to the end of the spring term, although for Year 5 this spans a more limited period than the other years because assessments for this year were not judged by the school to be secure until December 2008. Teachers comment on the usefulness of these sheets in alerting them to the pupils who have fallen behind. The school is now in a good position to monitor and analyse pupils' progress in all years to pinpoint areas of ongoing and persistent underachievement.

The school's tracking information up to April shows that pupils' progress is picking up but it is not consistent enough across year groups, classes and sets. There are some pockets of good progress in Year 4 and Year 6. In Year 6, pupils have made very good progress in writing and mathematics between September and April. Pupils in Year 4 continue to make satisfactory progress and in some sets it is good, although more so in reading and mathematics than in writing. The improvements in pupils' progress have been slower in Years 5 and 7 where many pupils need to catch up more quickly to make up the gaps in learning that have arisen from their past underachievement. There are some examples of accelerated progress. In Year 5, for example, well over half the pupils in one set have made good or very good progress in the last term, but in another set fewer than one in ten have made this rate of progress. In writing, pupils' punctuation, spelling, handwriting and ability to structure sentences are generally weak. For many pupils, the gaps in their literacy skills hinders good learning and progress in mathematics and science because they have difficulty reading and understanding the worksheets they are given.

During the visit, national and optional tests were taking place in Years 6 and 7. Inspectors spent time scrutinising pupils' work in the three subjects, concentrating mainly on pupils' learning and progress since the last visit. This very much reflects the picture from the school's tracking: pupils' rates of learning remain too variable between classes and year groups. Progress for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been generally slower to pick up. The school is aware of this and is developing its intervention programmes in English, mathematics and science.

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' behaviour continues to be good overall. Pupils continue to have positive attitudes to school. The increasing emphasis on practical activities, in science for example, is leading to greater enjoyment and involvement. Several pupils in Year 6 spoke positively about how well prepared they felt for their national tests. They enjoyed breakfast club and were buoyant and positive. Members of the school council are developing their contribution to school life, for example through being involved in appointing new staff. Attendance is broadly average. The school has a set up 'The Sanctuary' for pupils with particularly challenging emotional and behavioural difficulties. Teachers report that the learning atmosphere has improved for the other pupils and fixed term exclusions have reduced compared with last year's figures.

Quality of provision

The quality of teachers' planning and assessments is improving steadily, due to focused support and monitoring by senior leaders. Since the last visit, the leaders have concentrated on monitoring lessons in mathematics and guided reading. Reading was not a focus on this visit. Teaching is improving in mathematics and the most recent round of observations by senior leaders judged all lessons to be at least satisfactory. Scrutiny of pupils' work in mathematics shows pockets of good teaching and learning. This was evident, for example, in two mathematics sets in Year 4, where pupils' work showed good variety and challenge, leading to consistently good progress. However, while some teachers do have high expectations of pupils, learning and progress remain too variable. From the sample of books that were seen, progress was generally better in the middle and upper sets than in the lower sets.

Teachers' expectations for writing also vary. In some classes and sets, teachers set high expectations and give pupils good guidance on how well they have achieved the main learning points and how they can further improve their work. This is contrasted by less effective teaching, where teachers are too accepting of pupils producing work of a low standard when they capable of a better standard.

Weaknesses, such as sentence construction, spelling, punctuation and handwriting, are being picked up well by some teachers but this is by no means consistent.

The science leader for Key Stage 2 has provided support for teachers to help them with their planning and assessment of pupils. He has identified that pupils are given too many worksheets in some classes and that there are still some gaps in pupils' learning. Inspectors' scrutiny of science books shows there are inconsistencies in the quality of pupils' learning, with a significant amount of work in some classes undated and unfinished. Pupils were developing their scientific and investigative skills well in one science lesson observed during the inspection. They were enjoying finding scientific clues and discussing their conclusions. The good visual and tactile resources captivated pupils' interest and pupils worked hard. This was a good example of pupils being motivated by challenging and interesting work.

Across the three subjects, books show many pupils are not taking care with how they present their work and this is not always being picked up by teachers. Despite the school's efforts to give clear guidance and develop greater consistency, there are examples of unmarked and undated work, which makes it difficult for leaders to monitor the quality and rate of pupils' ongoing learning

Since the last visit the school has developed greater consistency in its tracking of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The school has set up a tracking system in science which has already led to teachers revising their planning, particularly in Year 6, to set up intervention programmes for pupils who need to catch up. All year leaders are making increased use of the school's tracking data to plan support for pupils who have made little or slow 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 senior team is continuing to give clear leadership. Staff are working hard towards improving the school and staff morale is good. The senior leaders' commitment to raising standards is in no doubt. Since the last visit, the leaders have focused effectively on developing planning and assessment and have brought about greater consistency. These are improving but have not yet had sufficient impact upon pupils' learning and progress in Years 5 and 7. The improved tracking systems and the assessments taking place this week, and again at the end of the summer term, will provide valuable information on pupils' learning over a longer period. Consequently, the school will be in a good position to diagnose the classes, sets and

subjects where pupils' progress needs to accelerate and to plan appropriate actions and interventions.

The headteacher and assistant headteachers have set up a more substantial programme for monitoring of teaching and learning since the last visit. Owing to the tests taking place during this visit, a small number of lessons were seen by inspectors but the judgements made matched the senior leaders' judgements from their latest monitoring. Evaluations of lessons comment fully on teachers' actions but there is less emphasis on what has been learned, particularly the learning of different groups of pupils. The subject leaders for English and mathematics are developing their leadership capacity well in terms of monitoring teaching and learning. This has not yet occurred in science or for pupils with special educational needs.

The school's evaluation of its action plan records the actions that have been taken and there is some evaluation of their impact in relation to the milestones set for March 2009. There is insufficient detail of milestones beyond this date. In some areas, the school's evaluation is over generous and it does not indicate where actions have had less impact and there is still further work to be done. For example, pupils' progress in Years 4 to 7 is judged to be at least satisfactory whereas data and pupils' books show that there are too many inconsistencies for this to be the case.

Members of the governing body have had appropriate training since the last visit to help them hold the school to account for its standards, for example developing the role of link governors and gaining greater familiarity with the school's performance in national tests. They are developing their knowledge of the progress that pupils are making but need to ask challenging questions of the school to help senior leaders tease out and address the inconsistencies in underachievement that remain.

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

Governors continue to receive good support from governor services. The School Improvement Partner has made a good contribution to monitoring of teaching. The local authority appointed a new Senior Quality Assurance and Improvement Advisor in February 2008 and the school has received good support, although it is still early days to see the impact. The impact of the local authority has not been strong enough in Key Stage 3 and support for Year 7 has been slow to get off the ground. The most recent minutes of the local authority's strategy group, which is responsible for monitoring the progress of the school while in special measures, are showing a greater emphasis on requiring evidence to support judgements than was the case at the last visit. This is a positive development, particularly in relation to pupils' learning and progress and how well the school is addressing the legacy of underachievement that has taken place prior to the school going into special measures.

