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16 February 2011

Mrs J Wood
Consultant Headteacher
Midpoint Centre
Cromer Gardens
Wolverhampton
WV6 0UA

Dear Mrs Wood

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Midpoint Centre

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 February 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

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 the Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Raise expectations and improve learning by:
 - rigorous assessment of students' prior attainment and their progress
 - using assessment effectively in setting targets and planning work that is challenging
 - taking steps to develop effective transition arrangements with schools.

- Strengthen teaching by:
 - developing a variety of approaches to increase students' enjoyment and engagement in learning
 - encouraging students' evaluation of their own and other students' progress.

- Improve provision in English, especially in relation to supporting those students who find learning literacy more difficult than most.

- Develop more effective strategies for improving attendance so that persistent absenteeism reduces by 20% within one year.

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - making the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work rigorous
 - ensuring that the management committee supports and challenges the school in relation to students' achievement and personal development.

Special measures: monitoring of Midpoint Centre

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 February 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the consultant headteacher and deputy headteacher, the substantive deputy headteacher, the attendance officer, other members of staff, off-site providers, the chair of the management committee and two representatives from the local authority. Inspectors visited three off-site providers that Midpoint pupils attend weekly, a two week off-site project for Year 11 pupils, and a sports session for Year 10 pupils at a local boxing club.

Context

The substantive headteacher resigned from her post in January 2011. The consultant headteacher's and deputy headteacher's secondments are continuing until the end of the summer term. The secondments of three members of staff, including the English leader, to other pupil referral units in the local authority are still in place. English is being taught by two teachers on short-term contracts. During the inspection the regular timetable was not in place. Instead, Year 11 pupils were following an intensive two week course at another site, focused on enabling them to gain a Wider Key Skills qualification. Year 10 pupils were working on a project in and out of the centre called 'Every Second Counts', designed to help them to work intensively towards their English and mathematics examinations. They also took part in a sports session away from the site.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The improved curriculum, better teaching and a greater focus on learning have begun to have an impact on pupils' progress. These aspects are also having a positive effect on the pupils' enjoyment of lessons and enrichment activities. The centre's tracking system shows that the majority of Year 11 pupils are making at least some progress, but few are on track to meet their challenging target grades in their accredited subjects by the end of the summer term. For Year 10 pupils, who have benefited the most from the centre's improvements, the picture is more positive. Almost all the pupils who are based at the centre are on track to meet their targets in at least one subject, and the majority of pupils are on track in at least half their subjects. An intensive two-week study programme concentrating on English and mathematics is accelerating progress for those who have attended it. Poor attendance remains an issue for a number of pupils and this adversely affects their achievement.

In the off-site sessions observed during the inspection, pupils were making good progress with their personal and social development as well as learning a range of new skills. They were overcoming their sometimes considerable reluctance to try new experiences, they were challenging themselves and they were enjoying their success. In their English lessons on site they were working steadily to complete their examination work and achieving an appropriate standard.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance remains very low but the overall attendance figure masks some considerable individual successes and improvements. Just under a quarter of the pupils have an attendance record of over 90% and another four are now attending for over 80% of the time. Almost half the pupils have better attendance this year than they did last year, at Midpoint or at their previous provision. An increasing number are enjoying and valuing their time at the centre and many continue to find the attendance rewards motivating. There remains a significant core of pupils with extremely low attendance. Often, when these pupils join Midpoint they already have a deeply ingrained pattern of poor attendance which is exceptionally challenging for the centre to reverse. The attendance officer, with the support of the senior leaders, works tirelessly to challenge and support families, and this is continuing to have an impact. The centre has rightly identified that punctuality is an appropriate area on which to focus next, alongside the continued drive to improve attendance.

The centre's records show that pupils' behaviour is largely satisfactory, although the nature of their difficulties means that there are incidents of challenging behaviour at times. The majority are making reasonable and sometimes good progress in improving their behaviour. There have only been two exclusions since the last visit. During the visit, pupils displayed positive attitudes towards their work away from the school site, and an appropriate awareness of health and safety.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Develop more effective strategies for improving attendance so that persistent absenteeism reduces by 20% within one year – good.

The effectiveness of provision

At the end of last term the centre carried out a series of thorough baseline assessments in English and mathematics. This has given an accurate picture of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses, which is assisting the staff's planning. Work in mathematics is challenging students at the appropriate level. The introduction of netbooks is being used to plan a more individualised approach to the mathematics curriculum for some of the less able pupils, and to allow others to make up the gaps in their learning. The English curriculum has improved significantly. After careful consideration, the two staff leading this area have introduced the Functional Skills

qualification in place of GCSE. Pupils are finding this motivating and their work is beginning to show accelerated progress. Importantly, the curriculum still contains a focus on reading full texts, which pupils are enjoying. Pupils whose reading levels were very low on entry are being given appropriate support, which is having a positive impact on their skills. New resources, including books, are interesting and age appropriate. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is at an early stage of development and the consultant headteacher has rightly identified that this is now a priority in order to improve the pupils' skills.

Observations by the local authority and the head of centre have identified that staff do not always use questioning well enough in lessons. Sensibly, leaders have adapted the lesson planning format to take this into account and questions are now considered when lessons are being planned. However, pupils often give one word or very short answers and staff do not always ask them to extend these.

Staff have been given a range of training and development opportunities, some of which is tailored to their particular needs. Increased links with mainstream schools are already proving valuable. Teaching assistants are now taking a more prominent part in supporting learning rather than managing pupils' behaviour. The consultant headteacher has rightly identified that further training and support is required so that they can adapt effectively to this role.

Visits to external providers showed that the pupils have a range of interesting and engaging opportunities to work outside of the centre. Pupils enjoy their time at their placement and often arrive early or are prepared to do additional work in the evening or during holidays. The providers said they noticed a big improvement in students' personal development and confidence. For some this meant they were able to take responsibility by answering the phone and dealing with money from customers, for others it was being able to confidently handle animals. All providers commented that they felt that the placements were helping the pupils to manage their feelings and behaviours. Some pupils had seen the need to give up smoking as a result of their physical efforts during the activities. While these important improvements to pupils' personal development are recognised by the providers, there is no formal system of recording and tracking these. When students complete written work on their placement there is not the same emphasis on ensuring literacy skills are used effectively and that there are the same expectations of work as when students are based in the centre.

The growing 'discipline through sport' programme is effectively extending pupils' experiences and skills. Sessions are well planned with a strong focus on personal development as well as sporting skills. There is an appropriate focus on accreditation.

Transition arrangements are again much improved. In particular, there is now clear and regular communication between the centre and its feeder special school. The centre has worked closely with the school to agree the arrangements for the

summer term. Importantly, this will involve staff from Midpoint working with the new pupils in their school, then the school's staff working with them on a two-week transition project at the centre. An information pack has been put together for all parents, which is followed up by home visits.

The centre is involving an increasingly broad range of agencies to support the pupils' very complex personal needs. Action taken to improve attendance is robust and legal action has been taken with the families of several non-attenders. The centre recognises that they are not consistently emphasising to pupils the link between attendance and achievement.

As at the time of the previous visit, a few pupils are on part-time timetables. However, the consultant headteacher is rightly determined that this will be for the minimum time possible, and clear plans are in place to increase the time in the centre week by week at a rapid pace. A small number of other pupils spend the majority of their time with the Key Team, a local authority service. Since the previous visit the links between this service and the centre have improved and pupils are now beginning to attend small numbers of lessons at the centre.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Raise expectations and improve learning by:
 - improving transition arrangements; rigorously assessing students' prior attainment and their progress
 - setting challenging targets
 - planning challenging work – good.

- Strengthen teaching by increasing enjoyment and engagement and increasing pupils' involvement in assessing their own and others' work – good.

- Improve provision in English, especially in relation to supporting those students who find learning literacy more difficult than most – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The direction and vision for the centre are becoming increasingly clear and the culture is changing significantly. The consultant headteacher, well supported by the deputy headteachers, is very consistent in her emphasis on learning and determined that every pupil will succeed. Staff are working hard to achieve this vision, with growing effectiveness. The improved deployment of staff is starting to make more of the staff's talents and skills. Relationships between the staff and the pupils are a growing strength. Staff recognise the need to challenge pupils to do their best and are willing to do this even though this new level of challenge to pupils sometimes results in uncomfortable situations.

The consultant headteacher has set a suitably ambitious agenda for the management of behaviour. The emphasis is rightly on managing pupils' behaviour in the centre and exclusions are only used for the most serious incidents. Importantly, she is combining this with training and support for staff, including a focus on managing stress.

Senior leaders have improved the tracking of pupils' progress. This now gives a clear picture of current attainment and is well focused on the actions which will be taken to support each pupil who is underachieving.

The management committee is well organised. Members are providing both challenge and effective practical support. A parent of a current pupil has joined the committee.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Strengthen leadership and management by making monitoring and evaluation rigorous and ensuring that the management committee supports and challenges the school – good.

External support

The local authority has provided an appropriate range of support to assist the centre's improvement. Support for the development of English is good and has been appreciated by the centre. The continued support for improving attendance is effective and the local authority recognises that it is crucial that this continues if attendance is to improve further. The regular task group meetings are well focused on the actions which need to be taken by the authority to support the centre. The local authority is working with the consultant headteacher, special schools and other pupil referral units to set the strategic direction for the authority's provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, no action has yet been taken to resolve the situation of temporary leadership of Midpoint and other temporary secondment arrangements.

There is now a draft admissions policy for Midpoint which states that the number of pupils on roll at the centre should be 56, not 120 as stated in a previous document. The policy does not set out in sufficient detail the information that schools should provide about pupils' progress and attainment prior to their admission to the centre. Since the previous visit, no Year 11 pupils have been placed on the centre's roll with whom the centre was not previously involved.