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18 February 2011

Ms Anne Lowry
Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks Alternative Curriculum PRU
c/o The Knole Academy (East)
Seal Hollow Road
Sevenoaks
TN13 3SN

Dear Ms Lowry

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks Alternative Curriculum PRU

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your pupil referral unit (PRU) on 17 February 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the School Improvement Partner, the education lead for the attendance and behaviour service, and the chair of the management committee for finding the time to speak with me.

Since the previous inspection, the unit's administrative base has moved to its current location in January 2011, although this is only a temporary measure while a permanent base is determined. In addition, the number on roll has increased by approximately a third since the unit was inspected last.

As a result of the inspection on 20–21 May 2009, the unit was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the unit has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Students attend one of seven provisions, which, collectively, constitute the PRU. Only one is a local authority establishment. The remainder are owned and managed by commercial organisations which are commissioned to provide specific educational and training programmes. Each is led by a centre manager. The quality of education provided by this range of establishments is variable. This is reflected in students' enjoyment of what is offered, as evidenced by the variable attendance rates at the different establishments in 2009–10. Decisive leadership decommissioned the least effective provider and students respond much more positively to its replacement.



Currently, students attend regularly at some sites, and the overall rate shows a small increase since the last inspection, although attendance generally remains low.

Through the School Improvement Partner and regular joint evaluation meetings, the local authority works closely with the headteacher in trying to eradicate inconsistent practice by getting all provisions to adhere to common procedures. Despite this coordinated approach, leaders have not been wholly successful in achieving this, although the situation is improving. One stumbling block is the PRU's remit, which covers a very geographically dispersed and diverse variety of provisions.

Furthermore, the headteacher does not have any leadership colleagues who have a perspective of the whole PRU to assist with monitoring, evaluating and supporting the different provisions. Consequently, while there have been good developments in establishing uniform management systems in each provision, not all centre managers apply them as effectively or consistently as they should. For example, in some instances, teachers' planning routinely shows a clear link to students' prior achievements, resulting in focused learning activities. In other situations, the link remains tenuous. Therefore, students in some provisions learn at a good pace and achieve well, but outcomes are not so positive in others. Overall, attainment is broadly average, and learning and achievement are satisfactory.

It is relatively recently that the management committee has strengthened its effectiveness through closer scrutiny of the impact that the PRU has in improving outcomes for all students, irrespective of the provision in which they are placed. It is able to do this because the different provisions are submitting assessment data and other information more regularly in response to leaders' expectation that centre managers follow the procedures that have been implemented. As the expectation heightens and the procedures become more embedded, data are being forwarded for centralised collation and scrutiny more consistently and on time. Consequently, there is much better provision-based and centralised tracking and analysis of students' learning and behavioural targets, and of the progress they are making towards attaining them. This includes students' literacy and numeracy targets.

Plans to provide all students in the Adolescent Resource Centre with meaningful work experience have improved, following a period of little change. The PRU made changes during 2009–10, but the arrangement did not meet fully the needs of this particularly vulnerable group of students. The new partnership that has been forged since September 2010 is paying dividends as more flexible arrangements result in higher levels of student participation.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your pupil referral unit. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell
Additional Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2009

- Improve attendance in order to accelerate learning and raise achievement.
- Use assessment data consistently to better inform lesson planning, so that work more closely meets students' needs.
- Assess students' literacy and numeracy skills on entry and consistently track their progress over time in order to set them regular, challenging targets.
- Provide all students in the Adolescent Resource Centre with meaningful work experience so as to enhance their work-related skills.