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25 November 2010

Mr Iain Hutcheon
Acting teacher-in-charge
Ashdale Pupil Referral Unit
Sulby Avenue
Middlesbrough
Teeside
TS3 8RD

Dear Mr Hutcheon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ashdale Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Following my visit to your school on 24 November 2010, 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 Ashdale became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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 – 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.

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 Middlesbrough local authority.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

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

- Raise the quality of leadership and management to a suitable standard by:
 - improving self-evaluation by developing more comprehensive ways of measuring progress and improvement against which the effectiveness of the centre can be judged
 - evaluating the impact of action taken to bring about improvement.
- Raise attendance by:
 - improving the management of behaviour
 - reducing the use of exclusion by 50% over the next term so that it is used as a final sanction rather than an everyday occurrence.
- Improve teaching and learning by raising expectations and improving teachers' skills in managing behaviour in lessons.

Special measures: monitoring of Ashdale Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 25 November 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the work of the PRU, scrutinised documents and met with the new temporary teacher-in-charge, students, teaching staff, the chair of the management committee and representatives from Middlesbrough local authority.

Context

The Ashdale centre supports students from Year 10 and Year 11 with a wide range of social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. Almost all of the students have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools; however, a small minority attend because of medical conditions or other circumstances which make them vulnerable. The majority of students are boys and several transfer to Ashdale having spent time in the local Key Stage 3 PRU. At the time of this visit, 38 students were registered at the centre. Four students were in the care of the local authority and one had a statement of special educational needs.

The teacher-in-charge of Ashdale at the time of the previous monitoring inspection has left his post and a new temporary teacher-in-charge was put in place by the local authority in October 2010. He also has responsibility for the leadership of the Key Stage 3 PRU.

Two weeks before this monitoring inspection the PRU moved to new purpose-built premises funded as part of Middlesbrough's Building Schools for the Future programme.

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

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning have improved since the last monitoring inspection. In the lessons observed, most students were making good progress in their learning, although attainment remained below those expected for their age. Analysis of the attainment of Year 11 students who left Ashdale at the end of last term indicates that the vast majority of students did not reach high enough standards in English, mathematics and science. However, almost all of the students who left in July secured some qualifications and gained the personal and social skills to enable them to move on to college courses, work-based training or employment. The vast majority have been retained on their new programmes.



Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve students' learning and progress – satisfactory

Other relevant outcomes

Students' behaviour during the monitoring visit was calm and polite. Students cooperated well with each other in lessons and around the centre. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been more than halved since the last monitoring inspection and exclusion is now a relatively rare occurrence. There are still occasions when behaviour is very poor but the introduction of new behaviour management systems is reducing the frequency of such incidents. Staff have developed higher expectations of behaviour since the last monitoring inspection and students are responding well.

Attendance is monitored closely and accurate data are produced which show a pattern of improvement. Despite this, there remains a small group of students who are persistently absent. Plans are in place to analyse the attendance of individual students in a more critical way and build this into a more holistic evaluation of the impact of the support being used to promote improvement.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise attendance by improving the management of behaviour – satisfactory
- Reduce the exclusion rate by 50% over the next term so that it can be used as a final sanction rather than an everyday occurrence – good

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is better, with particular improvement in relation to promoting students' enjoyment of lessons. Results of a recent school survey indicate that the vast majority of students agree that teaching at Ashdale is good and that, as a result, they feel they make good progress during lessons.

In most lessons, class sizes are very small and there is a focus on learning activities tailor-made for each individual. Lesson plans provide a framework for teachers to work within and contain details of the intended learning outcomes for each individual student. In the lessons observed, students behaved well and showed interest and enjoyment in learning. However, some tasks that teachers set lacked sufficient challenge and repeated work that had been done in previous schools. This is because sometimes insufficient information is made available to teachers on students' prior educational experience. The exercise books examined showed that marking is done well and students generally take pride in the quality of their work.



Students are offered a wide range of training programmes through the involvement of external providers. During this visit there was no opportunity to visit external providers, although the local authority provided evidence that showed an appropriate quality of provision was available.

The staff to student ratio at Ashdale is very high, with students often being supported on an individual basis. The quality of support has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. There are more effective care plans in place to support the integration of students joining the PRU. Staff know the students well and work hard to engage their interest and commitment to learning. However, the unintended impact of this intense individual support is sometimes to reduce the opportunities students have to work independently. Many students have difficulties with reading and writing. Some teachers attempt to support students by correcting spelling mistakes and basic mathematical concepts, but too little is done to provide them with strategies to improve and consolidate their skills.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve teaching and learning by raising expectations and improving teachers' skills in managing behaviour in lessons – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Shortly before this monitoring inspection a new temporary teacher-in-charge was put in place. With the support of the local authority he has introduced a more positive and ambitious approach to many aspects of Ashdale's work. This, together with the move to a new purpose-built school, has had a significant impact on improving the aspirations of students and staff. All leaders and managers acknowledge that it is too early to judge many of the projected outcomes of the changes but there are signs that the pace of improvement is accelerating. New initiatives are planned to improve the tracking of students' progress by taking a more personalised approach to record keeping and setting more ambitious targets. The detailed single central record of safeguarding checks shown to the inspector complies with current government regulations.

Wide-ranging action plans have been the driving force behind improvement so far. A more focused evaluation of the work of the centre is being carried out to enable the current action plan to be revised and made more appropriate to the long-term vision for the PRU and how it fits in with the local authority's wider complementary education service.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve self-evaluation by developing more comprehensive ways of measuring progress and evaluating the impact of action taken to bring about improvement – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has provided a high level of resources and good quality support to the PRU. The acting head of the Complementary Education Service has worked closely with the new temporary teacher-in -charge to develop new management systems and build capacity for sustained improvement. The new campus is greatly appreciated by students and staff and co-location with the Key Stage 3 PRU offers opportunities for professional development which are well supported by local authority personnel. The local authority acknowledges the need to ensure a more consistent approach to leadership that will consolidate the work of the last few months.

Priorities for further improvement

- Set universally understood goals and benchmarks and use these to establish a better system to evaluate the success of the PRU.
- Increase the level of challenge in lessons by ensuring learning objectives are more closely matched to students' prior attainment and potential.