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8 October 2010

Mrs J Wood  
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Midpoint Centre  
Cromer Gardens  
Wolverhampton  
WV6 0UA

Dear Mrs Wood

**Special measures: monitoring inspection of Midpoint Centre**

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 October 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 first 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 – satisfactory

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 first monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 October 2010**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the consultant headteacher and deputy headteacher, the substantive deputy headteacher, the chair of the management committee, the attendance officer and a representative from the local authority.

#### **Context**

The substantive headteacher has been absent from the centre on sick leave since shortly after the last inspection. A headteacher and deputy headteacher from a neighbouring pupil referral unit joined Midpoint as consultant leaders on a temporary basis at the start of June. The chair of the management committee resigned during the summer term and was replaced by the vice-chair. Three members of staff, including the English leader, have been seconded to work at other pupil referral units in the local authority. English is currently being taught by two teachers on short-term contracts. There are 49 pupils on roll. During each day of the inspection there were 13 pupils on the site, with a similar number attending off-site alternative placements. Off-site placements were not visited on this occasion.

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

Outcomes for last year's Year 11 were very mixed. Of the 39 Year 11 pupils, 21 gained at least one qualification: 12 attained between one and five GCSEs and the remainder attained Entry Level, Adult Literacy and Numeracy and vocational OCN qualifications which are relevant to college and employment. Several of those who gained no qualifications had joined in the last term of Year 11, leaving the centre with little time to influence their outcomes. Overall, while a small number achieved well, too many made little progress from the start of their time at the centre. Outcomes for many pupils were affected by their poor attendance.

There are firm plans to improve the outcomes for pupils during the course of this year and this is driving the centre's work successfully. The centre aims to enter the majority of the Year 10 and Year 11 pupils for a range of qualifications, including GCSEs. A small number of Year 10 pupils will take GCSE examinations early. A few Year 11 pupils attend only alternative provision off-site and will have little opportunity to gain any qualifications. effectively

In the lessons seen, pupils were well focused and were learning steadily. Year 10 pupils, in particular, have settled well and are starting to make the most of their time at the centre to improve their skills.

## **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Attendance at the time of the last inspection was 54.2%. From this very low baseline, it is improving steadily: this term's average is 71%. In the first five weeks of this term, around half of the pupils have improved their average attendance compared to the last academic year, including some whose previous attendance was exceptionally poor. Eleven pupils have a current attendance rate of 100%. There remains a stubborn core of very low attendance and too many pupils' attendance is sporadic. However, a number of pupils and their families are responding well to the centre's much-improved processes for monitoring attendance and challenging absence. Reliable first-day calling has elicited a good response from some families, as have home visits from the attendance officer, resulting in pupils returning to the centre promptly from absence or starting to increase their overall attendance. Some pupils are finding the new attendance reward raffle motivating. The centre is experiencing difficulties in collecting reliable information about attendance from one off-site provider.

The behaviour of the pupils who were on site during the inspection was at least satisfactory; many behaved well. Pupils were willing to talk about their work and their experiences, responding politely to questions. Bad language was rarely heard. Pupils treat the environment with respect: since the last inspection the centre has been painted, display boards have been put up and new computers installed, and all these remain in good condition. There have been no exclusions this term.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

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

## **The effectiveness of provision**

Senior leaders have considerably improved the transition arrangements for pupils joining the centre. By developing better communication with the neighbouring special school from which many pupils join, they are now able to make the most of the information which the school provides. Information about pupils who join from other settings is not always forthcoming but leaders have pursued this tenaciously. As a result, the centre now has Key Stage 2 and 3 data for all Year 10 pupils. This has been invaluable in enabling senior leaders to set all pupils appropriately challenging targets based on national data. Importantly, the baseline data also includes pupils' attendance, behaviour, and emotional development. This has been brought together in a clear format which gives staff a range of relevant information.

Staff are starting to use the improved assessment information to inform their planning. All staff are using an agreed lesson planning format, which gives each

lesson a clear structure and focus. Teaching observed during the inspection challenged pupils to think for themselves and to work independently. In all lessons, pupils responded well to the staff's calm and positive approach. In a well taught information and communication technology lesson, pupils worked at a good pace on a variety of different tasks and responded well to the teacher's high expectations. In a mathematics lesson, pupils showed tenacity when tackling a challenging concept. Pupils are seldom involved in assessing their own learning, although when they are they respond well. At the end of a motor mechanics lesson, pupils explained what they had learnt about tyres and demonstrated what this meant. This served the dual purpose of allowing the teacher to assess their understanding and enabling them to see how successful they had been. The consultant headteacher has rightly identified that marking is not useful in its current form because it does not focus sufficiently on what pupils have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

Some appropriate changes have been made to the curriculum, and more are imminent. Importantly, those Year 11 pupils who attend alternative off-site provision for most of their time are now studying mathematics and English while they are at the centre, with a view to gaining qualifications. The Year 10 curriculum is based largely on-site, giving staff the opportunity to get to know the pupils and to provide them with a curriculum which is suitably focused on gaining qualifications as well as new skills. A group of pupils are working with a nearby special school to achieve a sports leaders' award, which is contributing well to their personal development.

Two new English teachers, who started in September, have identified the main weaknesses in the provision for English and have begun to put a more appropriate curriculum in place. The consultant headteacher is aware that this is at the early stages and that much remains to be done, particularly to improve some pupils' reading skills. Nevertheless, the initial actions taken have started to engage pupils more effectively in English lessons and to develop their skills, particularly in speaking and listening.

A few pupils remain on part-time timetables but the consultant headteacher is tackling this robustly. A small number of other pupils spend all of their time with the Key Team, a local authority service. The consultant headteacher is rightly assessing the breadth of their curriculum with a view to increasing the pupils' time 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; and planning challenging work – good
- Strengthen teaching by increasing enjoyment and engagement and increasing pupils' involvement in assessing their own and others' work – satisfactory

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

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Since the appointment of the consultant headteacher at the start of June, the centre's progress has accelerated significantly. The consultant headteacher has a clear vision for the centre and, well supported by the two deputy headteachers, has driven improvement at a vigorous pace. She has a realistic understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and has prioritised her actions well. Crucially, she and the senior team have worked quickly to rectify the weaknesses in the exchange of information between the centre and feeder schools, and in the assessment of pupils' levels of attainment. As a result, the majority of Year 10 pupils have experienced a smooth transition to their new school, and staff have the information they need to plan and to teach effectively. As yet, there are few formal systems for monitoring the centre's work, but these are being introduced in a sensible order. For example, the consultant headteacher has prioritised the monitoring of behaviour and alternative provision and has begun the process of performance management for all staff. The attendance officer's monitoring of pupils' attendance, and the subsequent actions taken, are very rigorous. Staff have risen to the new challenges and are working well with the consultant headteacher to improve the outcomes and provision for the pupils.

The new chair of the management committee is an experienced education professional and he is using his knowledge well to shape the committee's work and to support the consultant headteacher. The recent addition to the committee of two more secondary headteachers and two parents of pupils who attend the centre has strengthened its membership. While these changes are relatively recent, the committee is already starting to provide a greater level of practical support and more challenge to the centre.

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's revised statement of action now includes milestones, but these are still insufficiently precise to inform the authority's monitoring both of the centre's progress and the effectiveness of its own actions. Nevertheless, the authority has a reasonable understanding of the progress the centre has made. 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's support for the centre has been satisfactory overall. The secondment of the consultant headteacher and deputy headteacher into the centre has been instrumental in ensuring that progress has been made. Improved support to raise attendance is starting to have an impact and the authority understands the importance of retaining this support if attendance is to reach an acceptable level. Importantly, local authority consultants' support for curriculum areas has been closely linked to the centre's priorities.

The admissions policy and criteria for the centre are unclear. Admissions practices during the last academic year, such as admitting Year 11 pupils during their last term, were not conducive to the centre being able to secure positive outcomes for the pupils. The nominal number of places, at 120, is very high and is not consistent with the size of the centre's building. The authority has long-term plans for re-organising its pupil referral unit and special school provision; nevertheless these aspects need urgent clarification and attention in the short-term so that leaders can plan for the coming year.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

The local authority and management committee should work with the centre to:

- devise a clear and appropriate admissions policy and procedures for the centre, to include the information which feeder schools should provide for each pupil
- ensure that all pupils, especially those who attend Key Team, receive a suitable full-time education and that the centre receives all the information it needs to be able to monitor the pupils' provision, attendance and progress.