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13 May 2011

Mrs K Kelly  
Headteacher  
The Phoenix Centre  
The Phoenix Centre, Eldon Street  
Darlington  
DL3 0NS

Dear Mrs Kelly

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Phoenix Centre**

Following my visit to your school on 11 May 2011 and 12 May 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 19 Jan 2010. 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 - good

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Darlington.

Yours sincerely

Dr Andrew Johnson  
Her Majesty's Inspector



## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 19 Jan 2010**

- Carry out a thorough review of safeguarding arrangements and:
  - ensure that all information relating to students' well-being and safety is recorded
  - analyse information regularly in order to ensure that the provision made for students meets their needs and helps them to improve their behaviour
  - ensure that information is accessible and cross referenced so that staff can identify potential problems at an early stage.
  
- Improve outcomes for students by:
  - implementing a behaviour management strategy which helps students to remain in the centre
  - rewarding positive behaviour
  - maximising opportunities to engage and motivate students
  - ensuring that students develop skills and attitudes which will support their successful eventual reintegration into mainstream schools.
  
- Improve the centre's effectiveness by:
  - ensuring that the headteacher and senior leaders implement a regular and robust system of self-evaluation which helps the centre to measure the impact of its actions and identify strengths and areas for improvement
  - providing teachers and other staff with well targeted guidance which will help them to improve their practice and the provision made for students
  - implementing policies which reflect the centre's ambitions for its students and ensure that all staff, students and parents and carers are clear as to what is expected of them.

## **Special measures: monitoring of The Phoenix Centre**

### **Report from the third monitoring inspection from 11 May 2011 to 12 May 2011**

#### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the work of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, staff, students, the chair of the management committee, a representative of the local authority, and visited a partner college.

#### **Context**

The Phoenix Centre supports 29 students in Key Stage 4 and 12 in Key Stage 3 who have a wide range of social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. The majority of students have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools and around 60% are boys. Eight students are in the care of the local authority, one has a statement of special educational needs and almost all come from a White British background. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The acting headteacher, appointed in January 2010, continues in this role, however, since the previous monitoring inspection, a reorganisation of the Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) service has begun. This includes a review of the staffing and leadership of the Phoenix Centre. This process is due to be completed by the end of term. From September 2011, the number of full time places at the Phoenix Centre will be capped at thirty.

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

Most students have a history of low attendance and poor attitudes to learning. As a result, their educational standards are well below average when they join the centre. School data indicates that most students are making the expected rate of progress in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). In the lessons observed, most students developed better understanding, knowledge and skills in mathematics and English, but they made the most impressive progress when studying vocational subjects.

#### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

The centre's mission has become more clearly defined since the previous inspection visit. It is to improve students' behaviour and support their personal development to allow them to re-engage with education. Students' behaviour has improved and they are generally compliant. They usually get on well with each other around the centre and during breaks. When taking part in vocational activities they are enthusiastic and keen to learn, in formal mathematics and English lessons their attitudes are not as good. The behaviour monitoring system indicates there are still incidents of extremely poor behaviour, although these are decreasing. The overall trend of fixed-term exclusions continues to fall. However, it rose in April due to the poor behaviour of a small number of students.

Many students still do not attend as often as they should and this has a significant impact on their progress. Data provided by the centre indicates that attendance has improved but is still low. A clear, new attendance policy and straightforward guide for parents and carers has been introduced. This makes it plain what the obligations of parents, carers and the centre staff are. However, further clarification is required on how the issue of persistent absence will be tackled by the local authority. Plans are in place to improve the transport arrangements for students, which, it is predicted, will have a significant impact on improving attendance and punctuality.

Individual assessment of students has improved and takes place to identify long-term objectives. In the majority of cases, it is agreed that there is little potential for students referred in Year 11 to be reintegrated into mainstream schools. Therefore, alternative targets are put in place to ensure successful progression to local colleges, employment or training. The centre no longer aims to provide a long-term solution to the education of students in Key Stage 3. The pupil placement panel assists the PRU in determining appropriate targets for re-integration, progression or referral to specialist educational provision. The centre can point to an increasing number of examples of how this system is successful. Since the previous monitoring inspection, five students from Key Stage 3 and 4 have been successfully reintegrated into mainstream schools. However, students who are in the care of the local authority are currently not predicted to progress as successfully to employment, education or training as their peers.

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

- improve outcomes for students by implementing a behaviour strategy which helps them remain in the centre, rewards positive behaviour, maximises motivation and ensures that they develop skills and attitudes that support their reintegration into mainstream schools – good

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Much time and effort has been devoted to improving the quality of teaching and this is beginning to have a marked impact on students' behaviour and progress. In the best lessons, detailed assessments are used to personalise students' learning. Class sizes are very small. Students often learn independently, although during the monitoring inspection there were missed opportunities to use information and communication technology to add variety and interest to activities.

Although classrooms are clean and tidy, some have limited displays to celebrate students work. There has been a good effort to brighten up the building. However, some areas remain bare and sparsely decorated.

It is planned to introduce more out-reach provision to enable the centre to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent exclusions from mainstream school. The acting headteacher with

the support of the School Improvement Partner has developed appropriate performance indicators to measure progress for individual students. Students are now provided with a wide range of subject choices. Several courses have been introduced to build students self-esteem and confidence and students benefit from a feeling of achievement when they succeed. However, some of the personalised programmes in Key Stage 4 lack ambition and are based upon students accruing a large number of level 1 qualifications rather than aspiring to reach more challenging levels in English and mathematics.

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

The acting headteacher, management committee and local authority have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre and have created a new more ambitious vision for the future. The pace of change has accelerated. The development plan links well with the new local authority EOTAS strategy and sets out a clear programme of improvement. However, a few of the development plan targets are still not sufficiently precise and, therefore, success is difficult to measure.

Partnerships with mainstream school leaders have been strengthened. This has been a key driver of improvement. Other partners, including Darlington College, are able to provide very successful part-time placements for students in Key Stage 4 that often lead to improved attendance and progression. A few strategies require further clarification, for example, the link between the proposed 'high impact team' and the authority's behaviour intervention team remains unclear.

Detailed safeguarding checks meet requirements and all staff receive appropriate training. Meticulous recording takes place in relation to students' well-being and safety. The number of students leaving the premises without permission has been reduced to a low level and is now a much rarer occurrence.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- improve the centre's effectiveness by ensuring that the headteacher and senior leaders implement a robust system of self-evaluation which helps the centre measure the impact of its actions; provide teachers and other staff with well-targeted guidance and support; implement policies which reflect the centre's ambitions for its students and ensure that all staff, students, and parents and carers are clear as to what is expected of them – good
- carry out a thorough review of safeguarding arrangements and ensure that all information related to students' well-being and safety is recorded, analysed regularly and accessible to ensure that potential problems are identified at an early stage – good

## **External support**

The EOTAS service of the local authority is undergoing reorganisation. A clearer vision and mission for the PRU have been established. This makes strategic long-term planning much easier. A local authority officer has been given responsibility for the oversight and support of the PRU. The School Improvement Partner continues to provide effective support and advice and useful additional support has been provided by a range of national advisers.