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13 May 2011

Mrs Y Locker
Interim Executive Headteacher
Children's Support Centre, Heybridge
The Heybridge Centre
The Street
Maldon
CM9 4NN

Dear Mrs Locker

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Children's Support Centre, Heybridge

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 May 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass my thanks to the management committee members and local authority personnel who took time to meet with me.

The school continues with an interim executive headteacher until the end of the school year. A substantive headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 22 September 2010, the school 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 school is making outstanding progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The service has gone well beyond developing the areas identified at the time of the last inspection, ensuring that firm foundations have been laid for improvement in a wide range of its work. Clear, perceptive and sharply-focused action planning by the local authority led to a rapid start in developing the service's work. Excellent support by advisers and consultants, often weekly, together with the headteacher's tenacity to attain the very best for students, has resulted in a rapidly improving service. The staff now have a 'can do' approach that has clearly been adopted by students; previous 'barriers' are now seen as challenges and opportunities.

The service tackled its safeguarding weaknesses immediately following the inspection. Systems and procedures for dealing with child protection matters are very thorough, in line with the local authority guidance and are highly secure. The wider aspects of safeguarding are monitored thoroughly. The service's survey of parents and students reveals the view that the service has high regard for students' safety.

At the heart of improving the progress of students with a statement of special educational needs has been effective assessment, and a significantly improved quality of learning and teaching for all students. Comprehensive induction procedures now include a good range of assessments, including thorough personal risk assessment. These changes mean that staff have a very clear picture of students' personal and academic needs. Staff's understanding of the levels students are working at has improved due to highly effective work by advisers and the headteacher. It has resulted in them using detailed criteria to identify the level students are working at, sharing this information so students know precisely how to improve, and providing them with effective feedback on how they are learning and behaving in lessons. Behaviour was good and often outstanding during the visit. Over time it is good, with no serious incidents of any kind and no exclusions.

In the six lessons observed on this inspection, half the teaching was outstanding, a third was good and none was less than satisfactory. In the most effective teaching, teachers' passion for their subject, the precise feedback given to students and the high expectations that students will do their very best, engendered great enthusiasm for learning and students often requesting to work outside lessons to extend their work. Even when there was satisfactory teaching, students' enthusiasm for learning was high. Occasionally, students were allowed to spend too long on an activity and were not always moved on to the next thing quickly enough. An important improvement, essential to the success of learning in lessons and rapid progress made, was the excellent quality of staff's probing, challenging and insightful questioning.

The service's detailed progress tracking system now takes full account of the short time most students spend with the service. It shows that all students, including those with statements, make good progress and that some make outstanding gains. Individual education plans are sharply focused on the key things a student needs to learn and staff take very good account of these in lessons. Compliance with statement objectives is high, although a few students stay too long at the centre because places cannot be found for them elsewhere.

The work of the management committee has been transformed. Members bring a very wide range of skills relevant to the service and its improvement and the chair is well versed in the challenges and pressures which student admissions and transfers bring. There is an extremely close partnership between the headteacher and the committee

and the committee now meets all statutory requirements. Each member has oversight of specific aspects of the service's work, such as special educational needs, and responsibilities are taken very carefully. Some members, through their highly effective practical work, have been instrumental in improving the tracking of students' progress and teaching and learning. Close monitoring of the service's effectiveness is at the centre of the committee's work.

Attendance has improved significantly. Although this has been the hardest area for the service to tackle, it has already reached its target of 80% and now is working towards 90% by the end of the school year. The best success has been in Year 11 which has led to greater opportunities for students to study towards GCSE and other examinations. There has also been a significant increase in students returning to mainstream school. This success means that there is a better 'flow' of students in and out of the service. However, those admitted often arrive with a history of poor attendance, thus making the target of 90% extremely challenging.

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

Yours sincerely

George Derby
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Establish clear, organised and structured procedures for recording safeguarding concerns and evaluate the effectiveness of the relevant policies and practices.
- Ensure that the appropriate authority and the management committee become effective by
 - fulfilling their statutory responsibilities
 - challenging and supporting the work of the centre through regular evaluation of the impact that it has on improving outcomes for students.
- Increase the rate of progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities through sharply focused and challenging targets in action plans that are regularly reviewed and evaluated.
- Further increase the level of students' attendance.