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19 May 2011

Mrs A Poole
Headteacher
Alternative Education Service
Whitehead Street
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE33 5LZ

Dear Mrs Poole,

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Alternative Education Service

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 May 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the teachers, management committee representative and local authority representatives with whom I met.

Since the previous inspection, three new teachers have been appointed, although a vacancy remains for a mathematics teacher. The centre has 50 places intended for students who have been excluded or who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. Currently, there are 17 students from Key Stage 4 and eight from Key Stage 3. In the past, the centre has supported a small number of pupils from Key Stage 2, although at present there are no pupils of this age attending. Five children are looked after by the local authority, one has a statement of special educational needs and most are boys. On the same site there is a separate local authority Behaviour Support Unit for pupils in Key Stage 2, the vast majority of these pupils have statements of special educational needs and are dual registered at mainstream schools, this facility is also managed by the service manager.

As a result of the inspection on 3 November 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 satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Students' progress and behaviour are better because the quality of teaching has improved. There have been 45 recorded incidents involving behavioural problems since the previous inspection compared with 257 in the previous year. The atmosphere in the centre during the inspection visit was calm and orderly. Although progress has improved, attainment and standards remain below average. During the inspection visit students were observed developing satisfactory skills and understanding across a range of subjects, although many still need to make up ground, particularly in mathematics.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Often teachers personalise learning based upon more accurate assessment information. Class sizes are very small with fewer than five students in most groups. However, lesson planning is carried out in a way that is more suitable for larger classes and often promotes an approach which encourages whole group rather than independent personalised learning. Teachers spend time at the end of lessons to reinforce learning and allow students to review progress and set further targets. Most students have problems with literacy and numeracy. Support for spelling and handwriting is not consistently effective across the curriculum.

The centre has introduced a variety of measures to improve students' attendance. For example, more vocational courses delivered off site have had a significant impact on improving attendance. However, despite this, there has been only limited success in reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent. Of the current 25 students, around 10 have very low rates of attendance, including some students in the care of the local authority. The centre recognises that longer-term sustainable reduction in persistent absence is crucial to raising attainment and prospects for future economic well-being. This will mean making the partnerships it has with local authority support services and parents and carers more effective.

The service manager and assistant service managers have been successful in developing better partnerships with mainstream schools and this has resulted in better initial information about students being available. Students who attend the centre are often successfully reintegrated to mainstream schools or progress to colleges or work-based learning.

The local authority has produced a suitable statement of action and provided a useful framework for driving improvement to teaching and evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken. The work of the School Improvement Partner and Regional National Strategies Advisers has been valuable in providing challenge and guidance to leaders. Evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning is more-accurate and robust. However, lesson observations tend to record teaching methods rather than focus on the development of individual students' learning. This monitoring inspection included a check on the school's single central record of staff in relation to the safeguarding of pupils and found that it generally meets current requirements and the centre is aware of the minor modifications that need to be made.

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

Dr Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 3 November 2010

- Improve teaching in order to raise pupils' attainment and improve the rate of progress by:
 - consistently assessing the progress pupils make in lessons in order to match work more closely to individual needs
 - varying tasks more precisely to meet different learning needs
 - ensuring that time is spent at the end of each lesson to establish what has been learned and remembered rather than to stress what has been taught
 - ensuring that pupils have the skills and qualifications they need for their future economic well-being.

- Improve attendance by:
 - developing stronger links with parents and carers, and with partner organisations involved in the social care of pupils
 - building on the improvements made to the curriculum in Key Stage 4.