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Mr David Stewart
Headteacher
Heathermount, The Learning Centre
Devenish Road
Ascot
Berkshire
SL5 9PG

Dear Mr Stewart

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Heathermount, The Learning Centre

Following my visit with Barbara Davies, social care inspector, to your school on 20 March, 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 October 2011. 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.

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 Governing Body and the Director of the Disabilities Trust.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2011

- Improve students' learning and progress so that they are at least satisfactory and students acquire appropriate knowledge, develop understanding and practise skills.
- Raise the quality of teaching to at least satisfactory in all lessons by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information to tailor work to challenge individual students to make further progress
 - lesson objectives and expectations for individuals are clear and these are followed up so that learning can be tracked and built upon
 - participation in all lessons
 - feedback is clear, regular and meaningful, and supports students to improve their learning.
- Ensure that there is a clear curriculum framework in place so that:
 - the range of qualifications available are appropriate to the needs, abilities and interests of the students
 - there is a clear progression planned for students as they go through the school, particularly in mixed-age and key-stage classes, so that students are consistently challenged and the content is interesting
 - the curriculum is responsive to the students' particular aspirations, age, disabilities and future destinations
 - the contribution of the school's 'augmentative curriculum' is clear and specialist approaches inform teaching and learning consistently.
- Improve the management of behaviour so that:
 - there are consistent expectations of classroom behaviour, bearing in mind individual difficulties, and inappropriate behaviour is challenged with a clear procedure to re-engage students in learning and make up for time lost
 - there are consistent expectations of behaviour in the dining room and shared spaces and a consistent response, bearing in mind individual difficulties, to how inappropriate behaviour is managed
 - incidents of inappropriate behaviour are systematically recorded in a format that can be quickly analysed and evaluated so that future actions can be planned, carried out consistently and lead to improvement
 - policies and procedures, particularly those relating to the management of behaviour, are up to date and implemented consistently.
- Improve the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures by:
 - improving health and safety procedures
 - strengthening the supervision of students on the school site.

- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels on raising achievement by:
 - systematically monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's provision and the impact on students' outcomes
 - monitoring and using assessment information on individuals and different groups of students to ensure that learning opportunities fully meet their needs
 - ensuring the consistent application of new initiatives, expectations and practices so that any variations or lack of staff knowledge or confidence is quickly addressed.

- The school must ensure that it meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools, which have not been met.

Special measures: monitoring of Heathermount, The Learning Centre

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 20 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including six lessons, scrutinised documents, held discussions with students and staff, and met with a representative from the Disabilities Trust, the charity which owns the school.

Context

At the time of the monitoring inspection, the headteacher was on sick leave following a surgical operation in December 2011. He is due to return shortly. During his absence, the Disabilities Trust has appointed a consultant principal to lead the school. Since the last section 5 inspection, a teacher has joined the senior leadership team to focus on improving the curriculum and teaching and learning. Also, appointments have been made for specialist teachers to teach mathematics and science, and for a teacher who has experience in the management of autism and challenging behaviour.

Achievement of pupils at the school

All students enter the school with levels of attainment that are below those expected for their age. At the last inspection, students' achievement and progress in relation to their starting points were judged to be inadequate because of weak teaching. Evidence from the present inspection demonstrates that teaching has improved and that students are making better progress, particularly in lessons that include practical activities. Senior leaders have introduced a recognised system for assessing and recording students' attainment. They are using these data effectively to track

the individual progress of students and to benchmark their progress against that for students with similar needs nationally. Evidence shows that, while students' progress remains inadequate over their time at the school, there has been a noticeable improvement since the last inspection. The data are not yet analysed to compare the progress of different groups of students within the school.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve students' learning and progress so that it is at least satisfactory and they acquire appropriate knowledge, develop understanding and practise skills – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

Teachers are generally using assessment information more effectively to plan lessons which build on students' previous learning and provide more appropriate challenge. A good example was observed in a social skills group when finely tuned targets were used to develop students' ability to take turns and use language more appropriately. Interesting activities are being provided in some lessons which enable students to learn in a practical way, for example when they conduct a science experiment or complete a vocational cookery course. In less successful lessons, instructions are not always presented in a way that students readily understand, work does not take sufficient account of students' individual level of ability and the pace of learning is too slow. The use of marking to give students feedback on their work has improved but is inconsistent between classes. The school is currently developing a communication policy to underpin an agreed approach to teaching pupils with an autistic spectrum condition.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise the quality of teaching to at least satisfactory in all lessons – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students generally displayed positive attitudes towards work during the inspection. Occasionally, some did display anxiety in lessons and would either leave voluntarily or be encouraged to take time out by the staff. There is some inconsistency in the management of students' behaviour when they refuse to engage and how work missed is followed up. Students are punctual to lessons, although arrival time at the start of the school day can be affected by the late arrival of transport.

Some older students spoke in a mature way about recent developments at the school. They reported that they found some of the changes unsettling, for example, the turnover of staff and the reorganised timetables. Staff have received training in behaviour management and the composition of class groups has been changed, which has helped to produce a recent fall in the number of behavioural incidents

requiring intervention. Students recognise this decline, but they also report that serious incidents still happen occasionally, which they find disturbing. Expectations of behaviour in the dining room and other shared areas are more consistent. The introduction of separate lunch sittings for older and younger students has eased crowding in the dining hall.

Incidents are recorded appropriately and data are gathered to provide an overall picture of students' behaviour. The most recent data show a fall in the number of incidents requiring intervention. The school has recently introduced a system for recording incidents which includes a more detailed analysis of the possible causes. It is too soon to evaluate the full impact of this system, but staff report greater confidence in understanding and dealing with students' behaviour. Revised policies on behaviour and bullying are currently in draft form and have not been finalised.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the management of behaviour – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The consultant principal and senior leaders demonstrate a strong ambition to improve teaching and learning and to raise the achievement of students. They have improved arrangements for monitoring the school's performance, have a better understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and have suitable plans for taking the school forward. New appointments have been made to strengthen teachers' specialist subject knowledge, the curriculum has been extended to include more challenging examination courses and better use is being made of assessment information to check students' learning. The use of data to analyse students' progress is developing well, and senior leaders recognise how its use can be extended further to check the performance of different groups. The impact of leadership has been impaired by the uncertainty arising from the long-term absence of the substantive headteacher. Also, some leaders have only recently assumed their responsibilities and are still developing their roles, for example in the monitoring of teaching and learning and in the development of the curriculum. The governing body has been reorganised, and is developing its ability to challenge and monitor the school's performance.

School grounds have been made safer. Potentially hazardous and unsightly areas have been cleared and low-hanging branches removed from trees. During the inspection, there was an appropriate level of supervision provided for students on the school site. Health and safety policies and procedures have been improved generally; however, not all the required checks have been completed to check the suitability of the most recent appointments.

The school now meets more of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and has tackled most of the recommendations made by the last

inspection. It has improved the accommodation with the installation of a new kitchen, rectified defects in electrical equipment, and improved staff training in the management of students' behaviour. Some aspects of staff training, for example, safer recruitment and fire safety, are planned but have not taken place. Some recruitment checks are not completed as required, and further improvements are needed to the general maintenance and decoration of a few areas of the accommodation. Many of the school's new policies and practices have only recently been implemented and the full effectiveness of these has yet to be tested.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that there is a clear curriculum framework in place – satisfactory.
- Improve the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures – unsatisfactory.
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels on raising achievement – satisfactory.
- Meet all the national minimum standards for residential special schools – satisfactory.

External support

The school has benefited from a satisfactory range of external support which is having an impact, particularly on the quality of students' learning and on the management of their behaviour. It has included support from a special school headteacher, local authority officers and an educational psychologist. Useful links have also been established with local mainstream schools to strengthen the curriculum. The Disabilities Trust has addressed the weaknesses identified in the original statement of action and it is now fit for purpose.