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Ms L Page
Headteacher
Albany Centre
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Dear Ms Page

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Albany Centre

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your centre on 4 May 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also convey my thanks to your students, staff, chair of the management committee and representatives of the local authority for taking time to meet with me.

Since the last inspection, the centre has experienced considerable staff turnover. Many of the staff present at the previous inspection have subsequently left. As acting headteacher you are new to the centre and have been in post for just over one term. You are now assisted by an acting executive headteacher who, at the time of this visit, had been in post for just one week. Many other staff changes have occurred. Most teachers and learning support assistants have been in post for less than a term. A new management committee, with a new chairperson, has also been installed. They met for the first time in January 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 14–15 September 2011, the centre 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 centre is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Senior staff and the chair of the management committee have ambition and vision for the centre. They have prioritised development needs accurately and are working with determination to ensure that the many improvements that have already taken place in provision will ultimately drive better achievement. Some difficult and radical decisions have had to be taken. For a time following the last inspection, teaching was centred in three off-site locations. This was to ensure behaviour issues were tackled and to enable improvements to the main centre in Bury St Edmunds. Though

further refurbishment work is planned, more tuition is now undertaken at this site. Teaching has improved. All lessons observed during this visit were at least satisfactory, with most featuring good learning. A detailed programme of lesson observations has been established and some competent teachers and learning support staff have been recruited. Good practice is now identified and is being shared through regular staff training sessions. These developments are already delivering results in the form of better teaching, greater student involvement, better behaviour and improved achievement. Attendance, though still below the national average, is improving and is also contributing to better student progress. All students have some degree of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, but all are making improvements in their work. Good progress was observed in English and science, in particular, but in all subjects there is a need to ensure greater consistency in the efforts made to improve students' literacy skills. Even more opportunities should be provided to encourage students to read for themselves and to write about what they have learnt. Less reliance on worksheets, with more emphasis on extended writing will give more scope for students to improve their basic literacy skills.

Good progress has been made in improving target setting. All students are now set challenging targets for attendance, punctuality, behaviour and for their academic work. Academic assessment procedures have improved well with the staff changes made at the start of the spring term. Progress against subject specific targets is now regularly monitored and informs lesson planning. Students now have individual targets for each class. The management committee is fully involved. They monitor outcomes and are aware of how well every student is progressing. These procedures are new and need to be embedded further but they are already having a most positive impact on student achievement and morale. The students feel better informed and are taking greater pride in their work.

Many recent changes have been made to the centre's senior staff and its management committee. Leadership is now more strategic. As acting headteacher, along with the recently appointed chair of the management committee, you have established a clear strategic plan for the service. Key functions have been delegated and you are closely monitoring outcomes. You will now be helped further in this task by the recently appointed acting executive headteacher. Roles and staff responsibilities are clear and performance management more challenging. Satisfactory progress has been made in establishing a new and more critical management committee. The new chairperson is a highly experienced school governor and brings to her position a wealth of experience. She has considerable vision and determination and knows what needs to be improved. The senior team, comprising the two acting headteachers, along with the management committee has already established a good action plan. You know what needs to be improved and you are working strenuously to reach the goals set. Progress at this stage is satisfactory. This is because many of the measures taken are new and will take time to embed and secure quantifiable improvements. The centre, after a period of considerable uncertainty and inconsistent results, is moving forward. Teaching is

stronger, a better curriculum is being established, attendance and behaviour are improving and the use of assessment data is more sophisticated and is driving progress. Further planned improvements to the centre's building and site will enable further curriculum development and provide better teaching facilities.

The local authority's statement of action fulfils requirements. The support offered by the local authority is good and is helping to drive sustainable improvement.

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

Bill Stoneham
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in 14–15 September 2011

- Improve the effectiveness of senior leaders and managers by:
 - fully resolving all long-standing staffing issues by the end of this year
 - further embedding leadership and management arrangements so that all senior leaders make an equal and effective contribution to driving improvement
 - creating more time for the headteacher to steer the strategic direction of the PRU
 - delegating responsibility for the monitoring of attendance, baseline assessments and monitoring of students' progress to other managers.

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and ensure that in most lessons teaching is good or better by:
 - providing all teachers with a detailed profile of students' prior attainment gained from testing on entry and scrutinising their planning to ensure that they use this information to plan lessons that meet the different needs of each student
 - requiring all teachers to regularly share assessment data with senior staff to illustrate how well all students are progressing
 - instigating a programme of regular lesson monitoring and providing teachers and assistants with accurate feedback to improve their performance
 - sharing best practice and providing additional professional support for teachers who need it.

- Increase the effectiveness of the management committee in supporting and challenging the unit so that weaknesses are tackled and statutory duties are met by:
 - regularly scrutinising the implementation of actions prioritised in development plans within the given timescales and monitoring the impact on students' learning and well-being
 - ensuring that the unit fully understands its role in promoting community cohesion and evaluating the effectiveness of its plans.