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21 June 2012

Christine Edden
Principal
Heathermount, the Learning Centre
Devenish Road
Ascot
Berkshire
SL5 9PG

Dear Ms Edden

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Heathermount, the Learning Centre

Following my visit with Clare Davies, social care inspector, to your school on 20 June, 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 second 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 it is at least satisfactory and they 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 second monitoring inspection on 20 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work including six lessons, scrutinised documents and policies and procedures relating to social care, held discussions with students and staff, and met with a governor and representatives from The Disabilities Trust, the charity which owns the school.

Context

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher was on sick leave and he has since decided not to return to the school. The Disabilities Trust has appointed a principal to lead the school on a fixed term contract until March 2013. The current school roll has remained stable since the last monitoring inspection. However, a reduction in the number of students is expected for September 2012, which has prompted The Disabilities Trust to undertake a review of the present staffing structure. This review has involved the leadership in managing a reduction in the full-time equivalent of teaching staff by three, and a reduction in support staff by seven. The changes will take effect from September 2012.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The scrutiny of students' work and the learning observed in lessons shows that overall, students are making better progress. Data are being used more effectively by senior leaders to track the progress of different groups of students. Evidence shows that students who are in Key Stage 3 are making faster progress, but that students in Year 11 have made less than expected progress during their time at the school. Inadequate progress is due largely to previous underperformance and the limited range of accredited courses currently provided. The school is taking positive steps to extend the range of courses available through the introduction of more GCSE and Entry level courses, and through establishing links with a neighbouring secondary school. The link with the local secondary school has, for example, enabled a few students to take GCSE examinations in dance and mathematics. Post-16 students benefit from the recently established apprenticeships in horticulture and hospitality and catering. Some students with low levels of literacy are making better progress due to the introduction of an intensive programme of support to boost their reading and writing skills. The use of assessment information to measure the full impact of this intervention is underdeveloped.

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 making learning objectives clear at the beginning of lessons and assessment information is being used to match tasks more closely to each student's level of ability. In the best lessons, teachers break activities down into small steps, regularly check students' understanding and praise them for what they have learned. Teachers also maintain the attention of students by dividing the lesson into a series of short sessions, sometimes alternating between mental and physical activities. A good example was observed in a literacy lesson where students switched from a sensory activity to a letter recognition game, which was then followed by a brief exercise session. Short reward times were also included to help motivate the students. Occasionally the pace of learning is slow and students become disengaged due to the distracting behaviour of others with challenging needs. Staff manage students with respect and patience. However, the use of rewards and praise is not always closely linked to students' immediate behaviour, which limits its impact on the learning of those students who find it difficult to concentrate. A revised marking policy has recently been introduced and it is being applied more consistently in classes across the school. Regular comments, often supported by symbols, are helping students to improve their work. The presentation and quality of work is generally of a higher standard.

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

The atmosphere around school is generally calm and students report they feel safe. Occasional incidents of inappropriate behaviour do occur, but these are managed with greater confidence by staff. Many staff have received training in non-confrontational behaviour management techniques and there are plans to extend this training to the rest of the staff group. The new system for recording incidents is working more effectively and there is closer monitoring and analysis of data by senior leaders. Incidents of challenging behaviour have reduced and most incidents involve a small number of students with complex communication needs and additional social difficulties. A good behaviour policy has been introduced and students have been involved in

producing a draft anti-bullying policy and in revising the school reward system. The full impact of these positive developments has yet to be realised.

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 principal and senior leaders are engaging staff successfully in shaping the future direction of the school. New policies have been adopted, for example on behaviour and for marking students' work, which are being implemented more consistently across the school. The quality of teaching is being monitored regularly and an overarching curriculum framework has been produced. Senior leaders recognise that further work is needed to extend the curriculum for older students and to ensure all students study topics appropriate to their age as they move up the school. The success of curriculum activities organised for the first lesson of the day is compromised by the late arrival of some students' transport. An appropriate range of experiences has been devised for students who require a programme of more individual and intensive support.

Safeguarding procedures have been strengthened and training has been delivered to all staff. Contact with the local safeguarding team has resulted in an improvement in medical procedures. Good arrangements are in place to tackle bullying, including cyber-bullying. Supervision levels on the school site are appropriate. Health and safety procedures have improved and there is a clear management overview with regular reports being given to the governing body. Fire awareness training has been completed by senior staff and the site manager, and weekly checks are made on the alarm system as required. The school now meets almost all of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and most recommendations made by the last inspection have been implemented. Some general maintenance tasks in a few areas of the accommodation have yet to be completed.

The Disabilities Trust and governing body have a clear vision for the school and have taken decisive action to restructure the school's staffing in response to an anticipated fall in the school roll.

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 – good
- 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 continues to benefit from a satisfactory range of external support. An educational consultant has helped to draw up a learning and teaching action plan for children with an autistic spectrum condition. A local authority literacy team has provided training for teachers and support staff. The school has also strengthened its partnership work with a local secondary school to help develop the curriculum. Other support has included advice from a special school headteacher and an educational psychologist.