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Mrs Francine Ledsham-Mills
Headteacher
New Summerseat House
Summerseat Lane
Ramsbottom
Bury
Lancashire
BL0 9UD

Dear Mrs Ledsham-Mills

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to New Summerseat House

Following my visit to your school on 15 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the heads of centre for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 provision (namely Park House and New Summerseat House, part of the Pupil Learning Centre), the deputy headteacher of the Pupil Learning Centre and manager of The Coney Centre (provision for Key Stage 3 pupils after their sixth day of exclusion), the chair of the management committee which oversees the work of all the pupil referral centres in Bury, the school effectiveness partner and a representative from the local authority. The self-evaluation summary and development plans were evaluated along with analyses and reports on achievement, behaviour and attendance, and the monitoring of teaching.

Context

Since the inspection in November, nine pupils have either returned to mainstream schools or been placed in other provision. Thirteen pupils have joined; five are girls. One full-time teacher took up her post in January: she has responsibility for English. Due to the absence of teaching and non-teaching staff, some pupils are working with temporary staff.

Main findings

The development plan follows closely the areas for further improvement identified in the inspection in November. It gives a detailed picture of intended actions but has few clear targets to indicate intended outcomes in the short and longer term. The targets related to the quality of teaching lack challenge and specificity given the differing profiles in Park House and New Summerseat House. The deputy headteacher has given a firm steer in her guidance on compiling the plans and in evaluating the progress to date with insightful, constructive comments and indications of next steps.

The joint monitoring of teaching by the heads of centre, headteacher and deputy headteacher has boosted the confidence of the heads of centre in making professional judgements. It has also given a clearer profile of teaching in each centre and confirmed the findings of the inspection in November in the need to develop the effectiveness of behaviour management and to raise staff's expectations of what each pupil can achieve. Teachers are starting to show greater consideration in their planning of the needs of each pupil but still focus more on what it is to be taught rather than how to structure learning.

The profile of teaching, however, is incomplete. Since the inspection in early November, staff absence accounts for 200 days, of which 115 days is that of teaching staff. This situation is unacceptable; the quality of provision for pupils is inconsistent and too often subject to change. The analysis of data from tracking pupils' progress has shown too many pupils are not doing as well as they should. In addition, not all staff are benefiting from the weekly training sessions, such as that last week on effective questioning, a key aspect of teaching identified for improvement. The management committee is rightly looking at ways to tackle the situation in consultation with the local authority.

The working party, set up to look at issues regarding low attendance, meets for the first time next week. Attendance figures from last term show a mixed picture. Although there has been a slight improvement overall, and parents and carers are being held more firmly to account, the figures highlight the continuing poor attendance of older pupils. There is scope to explore with pupils their irregular attendance and to negotiate ways to 'get round' the problems linked with the location of and travel to New Summerseat House. There is also scope to trial some of the planned changes in the curriculum and how it is delivered with possible links to other centres and personnel.

Staff are aware of the need to accelerate the pace of improvement. Heads of centre are gaining from working with the deputy headteacher to review the effectiveness of provision and to plan, implement and monitor change. While areas of responsibility are clear, the lines of accountability are not which is impeding prompter action in some areas.

Members of the curriculum sub-committee of the management committee are to take a specific interest in the school's progress in bringing about improvement. The committee has requested a breakdown of the use and impact of pupil premium funding; from April, the management committee will have responsibility for the school's total budget.

Senior leaders and management committee members have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommends that further action is taken to:

- identify clear, challenging targets in development plans (milestones) linked to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour
- ensure that the management committee a) evaluates regularly and critically the progress of each centre in meeting its targets, and b) is well prepared to manage and evaluate the use of the delegated budget from April
- ensure that the local authority supports the management committee in action concerning the absence of teaching and non-teaching staff
- monitor the effectiveness of the cover for staff absence to ensure that pupils receive good quality provision and full curriculum entitlement
- strengthen the lines of accountability in driving school improvement.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has responded to the school's request for support to develop leadership and management and teaching and learning. A request to The Greater Manchester Partnership has recently been accepted to fund support from a Local or National Leader in Education with experience of pupil referral units, as well as support from a Specialist Leader of Education with expertise in behaviour management. The authority also intends to allocate more days to the School Effectiveness Partner to support the school and facilitate contact with other providers. His report from mid November indicated where action was needed and how alternative approaches could be considered.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bury.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector