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Dr Sean Sweeney
Interim Principal
Action for Children, Parklands Campus
Bessels Leigh
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX13 5QB

Dear Dr Sweeney

Special measures monitoring inspection of Action for Children, Parklands Campus

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, members of the school's senior leadership team and a parent/carer member of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). A telephone discussion was held with the Chair of the IEB. I evaluated the school's statement of action and a range of documents relating to attendance, behaviour, teaching and pupils' achievement.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the Principal has left the school and you have been appointed as Interim Principal. The governing body has been replaced by an Interim Executive Board which includes trustees from Action for Children, a charity which is

the proprietor of the school, an experienced headteacher and a parent/carer. The school roll has fallen slightly and is currently 22 students. On the day of the inspection, almost all students were engaged in outdoor pursuit activities away from the school site.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The Interim Principal and senior leadership team, together with the IEB, share a strong commitment to securing the school's improvement and raising students' achievement. They are clear about the school's weaknesses and are taking suitable action to tackle them. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been sharpened and an audit of staff skills has been linked to further professional development. A programme of regular lesson observations has been introduced with support from an educational consultant.

At the time of the last inspection, teachers did not know whether students were making enough progress. Appropriate systems for gathering information on students' achievement and for checking their progress have been introduced, although it is too soon to gain an overall picture of achievement across the school. A useful 'student profile' has been drawn up for each student, containing a description of their individual needs and targets for improvement in behaviour and learning. The information contained in these profiles has potential for helping teachers plan lessons which take closer account of students' capabilities and provide a better level of challenge. School data suggest that students' behaviour is managed more effectively, which is demonstrated by a sharp fall in the number of serious incidents requiring exclusion.

The IEB has taken decisive action to strengthen the leadership of the school. Action for Children has arranged for a review of governance of the school which will be completed by September 2013. Following the review, it is intended that the IEB will be replaced by a new governing body. The IEB has a broad grasp of the school's work and members make visits to the school to gain first-hand information about its work. The IEB's ability to challenge some aspects of the school's performance, for example, whether students are making enough progress, is limited by the lack of historic data provided by senior leaders. Also, the school improvement plan does not contain sufficient information to enable members of the IEB to monitor fully the school's development. In some areas improvement planning lacks detail on what steps will be taken to achieve set targets for improvement and how actions will be monitored to ensure success. The IEB and senior leaders are working closely with an educational consultant to review the school's arrangements for planning and evaluating its progress. Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements.

An educational consultant has provided useful advice, particularly to help senior leaders judge the quality of teaching more accurately. Judgements by senior leaders were found to be too generous at the time of the last inspection. Several staff have visited a successful partner special school to seek ideas on how to improve teaching.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State and to Catherine Dugmore, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector