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Judith Sherington  
Interim Headteacher  
The Attic (pupil referral unit)  
The Attic Learning Centre  
Lovewell Road  
Lowestoft  
Suffolk  
NR33 0RQ

Dear Ms Sherington

**No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Attic (pupil referral unit)**

Following my visit with Sa'ad Khaldi, Additional Inspector, to your pupil referral unit on 18 October 2013, 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 a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

This inspection was to check on the safety and well-being of students who previously attended unregistered provision at The Attic Learning Centre, Walpole Learning Centre, Ferry nurture group, Harbour Medical Group and Old Fen Park (4RCE). The unit was given no notice of the inspection.

**Evidence**

Inspectors reviewed the single central record, other documents relating to safeguarding students and child protection arrangements. We met with you, two groups of staff, two students and the Chair of the Management Committee. We toured the accommodation and went to the off-site provision at Walpole.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The unit's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

## **Context**

The Attic was registered with the Department for Education as a pupil referral unit on 1 September 2013. The unit is registered to admit 32 students between the ages of eight and 16 years. The unit operates from two sites. The main site is at Lowestoft (premises formally known as The Attic Learning Centre) with off-site provision approximately a 40-minute drive away at Walpole (formally known as Walpole Learning Centre). Provisions formally known as Ferry, Old Fen Park (4RCE) and Harbour Medical Group no longer exist.

All students now attend either The Attic or other registered provision locally. Sixteen students attend the main site and four are at Walpole. Most staff who worked at the previous sites transferred to the unit. The staff and most of the students formally at Old Fen Park (4RCE) transferred to The Attic this week.

Most students have behavioural, emotional and social needs, and have often been permanently excluded from local schools. A few students have medical needs and these students usually work at the Walpole site. There are currently no pupils in Key Stage 2 but it is likely that any admitted to this age group will work at Walpole. Six students have a statement of special educational needs. Approximately half of the students are known to be eligible for support through pupil premium funding. Almost all students are of White British heritage.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Before the unit opened, you worked with staff at each site to make sure that they understood the policies and practices for safeguarding students. Training was provided on child protection and restraint. Staff know who to go to and what to do if they have concerns about students. Two senior staff are designated as child protection officers and have had the appropriate additional training. The single central record shows that the appropriate range of checks were carried out to ensure staff's suitability for working at the unit.

A new reward system was in place for the start of term. Staff and students like the system. There are times during the day when targets and points are discussed so that students have opportunities to stay on track with what is expected of them. During this inspection students participated appropriately in lessons, moved around the building sensibly and benefited from positive relationships with staff. Staff know students well. They meet to discuss issues and what to do about any concerns at the start and end of each day. Records are kept of these meetings so that actions can be tracked. Records of any incidents of inappropriate behaviour are kept in different folders and on different forms according to the type of incident. These are not yet brought together in a way that provides a complete picture of each student's behaviour or helps staff to analyse the effectiveness of policies and provision. The same is true for the recording of students' attendance.

In a short time, staff have established appropriate expectations for students to attend, learn and behave well. Interviews with students and their families prior to admission set out the unit's expectations. This includes a non-negotiable commitment to joining a programme to stop smoking.

Students attend each day, unless in a period of induction or in accordance with medical advice. They attend well, although not all are punctual. Some students spend part of the week at local NACRO provision (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders). The week finishes at lunch time on Fridays, which is not an appropriate arrangement because it is not making the most of the time available to make sure that students are fully safeguarded and have sufficient time for learning.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The challenges of establishing new ways of working and bringing together a new staff team are being tackled sensitively yet with high expectations. The most important aspects of the unit's work were made clear to staff and students from the very beginning. All staff who spoke with an inspector said that the structures and systems bring clarity, and that they were well prepared. They know what is expected of them and are keen to play a full part in the unit's development. They particularly value your openness and availability to discuss and clarify issues as they arise. The current review of staffing brings a period of uncertainty for some new staff.

You do not yet have a full picture of the quality of teaching and the curriculum. This is because you are at an early stage of setting up the curriculum, allocating teaching responsibilities and monitoring students' progress. Your expectations of staff are higher than some have been used to previously. You have observed some lessons and firm plans have been made for local authority advisers to support you in evaluating the quality of teaching and students' learning. It is also early for the management committee to set goals for the unit and monitor the effectiveness of the policies. The committee has met twice since the unit opened and its members represent a suitable range of expertise and interests.

You and the Chair of the Management Committee have a clear and shared view of the weaknesses of the unit and what needs to change. Together, you are ambitious for the unit to do well for its students and staff, focusing on students' academic success alongside meeting their behavioural needs and ensuring their well-being. For example, giving priority to developing students' literacy skills is being built into the curriculum. It is not yet clear how the curriculum will be personalised for different groups of students, according to their abilities, needs and ages. Most of the improvement work is being done by you. There is no senior team and no administrative support in the office. This is not sustainable in the long term because there is so much to do and no sharing of the load, although plans have been made to appoint a deputy headteacher. Your appointment as the acting headteacher is a temporary arrangement for the next 12 months, sensibly made so that no time was

wasted in setting up the unit. It also ensures a period of stability until a permanent appointment is made.

In general, the premises do not provide students and staff with the high-quality learning environment to which they are entitled. Accommodation at the Walpole site is vibrant and well maintained but this is not the case at the main site. Too many maintenance issues have not been sorted out quickly enough, such as broken windows, damage that has been boarded-up, peeling paint and cluttered classrooms and other areas. Displays of students' work are not always done well. Some classrooms provide a purposeful learning environment with considerable recent investment in resources, such as computers. Some areas are being developed, such as the art room, but others are not fit for purpose and currently unused, such as the design and technology room. Specialist facilities are limited and there is no area for outside play.

Activities to support students' well-being are an important and relevant part of the day, but the time available each day for teaching the curriculum is short and it does not run over five full days. All students must have access to five full days each week so that they can attend all day and every day, when medically fit to do so.

### **External support**

The local authority acted quickly to register the unit with the Department for Education and to appoint an acting headteacher. The county manager for inclusion is the Chair of the Management Committee, demonstrating the local authority's priority for this unit to succeed. You feel well supported by local authority advisers, who share your priority to improve teaching and students' learning. A SAG (Support Action Group) has been set up to monitor the unit's work closely and frequently.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Make sure that the content of the curriculum and the time available to teach it closely match students' needs and entitlements.
- Make sure that the accommodation at the main site provides students and staff with the high-quality learning environment that they are entitled to.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk, the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Management Committee. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**