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2 December 2013

Mr Danny Reeves
Headteacher
Birchwood PRU
The Brook Education Centre
Folkestone
Parkfield Road
CT19 5BY

Dear Mr Reeves

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birchwood PRU

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and members of the management committee are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Leaders should take further action to:

- finalise negotiations between the management committee and the local authority relating to school's future accommodation needs, so that the headteacher is able to plan the necessary staffing and curriculum requirements for next academic year.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other staff members and a representative of the local authority. I visited one of the four centres and was able to speak to some of the students and discuss their work with them. I also spoke to the Chair of the management committee on the telephone. I evaluated the school

improvement plans alongside a range of other documentation, including the actions taken to monitor and improve the quality of teaching.

Main findings

Since the inspection that took place in September, you have acted swiftly to improve the quality of teaching across each centre. With the support of the local authority, you have rightly ensured that all staff members are enrolled on the local authority training programme 'Every lesson Counts', through which their individual needs are identified and they are supported to improve. Teachers have found this training valuable. They say they now feel supported to improve their practice and welcome the challenge.

Students have noticed the difference. At the centre I visited they commented favourably on the improvement in marking, which they now find to be helpful because it identifies what they need to improve and how to ensure success. The headteachers of the four schools responsible for the management committee have also acted promptly. Sound arrangements have been made for experienced teachers of mathematics and English from one of their schools to train Birchwood staff and check their assessment arrangements, so that predicted exam results are both accurate and reliable.

Training in the teaching of English and mathematics has also correctly included opportunities for staff members to learn from best practice within the area, through classroom observations and follow-up training provided by the local authority advisor who has particularly focused on developing teachers' skills to improve students' reading, writing and mathematical abilities.

The monitoring of teaching is regular and rigorous. You have been explicit in your high expectations of both staff and students. A recent visit from an external consultant, confirmed your judgements of teaching and that it is now improving. Members of the management committee, particularly the Chair, have backed you in taking the necessary actions to improve teaching, including where necessary, formal procedures.

Systems to improve the monitoring and recording of assessment information and attendance are beginning to make a difference. Students are provided with incentives, such as free breakfasts to attend regularly and achieve well. They know their targets and are motivated to do better than in the past. New strategies to involve parents and keep them up-to-date and better informed are sound. These include the introduction of review meetings in which parents are updated on their son or daughter's attendance and progress in relation to their targets. Students who fall behind are identified at a much earlier stage and appropriate action is taken.

After a period of uncertainty about the school's future, the management committee has agreed that its provision of alternative support for students in Key Stage 4 is an absolute necessity in the forthcoming academic year and thereafter.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Since the last inspection the local authority has provided well-judged support. An adviser has been assigned to the school to provide the necessary guidance and challenge. She has helped with the scrutiny of students' work and worked alongside teachers to strengthen their skills in improving students' reading and writing skills. She also commissioned well-received training for staff and valuable consultancy for the headteacher on judging the quality of teaching.

The local authority and the management committee are in agreement that the school's four existing premises are not fit for purpose. At the time of my visit, however, no suitable alternative had been provided.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector