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Mr T Hanson
Service Manager
Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit
Seaton Lane
Hartlepool
Cleveland
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Dear Mr Hanson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hartlepool Pupil Referral Unit, Hartlepool

Following my visit to your unit on 13 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 unit since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the unit was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the management committee and the local authority are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The unit should take immediate action to address the areas of concern arising from this visit that are identified below.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with you, other leaders and managers, members of the management committee and representatives from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the improvement plan and other documentation, including records of the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management. In addition, I undertook a learning walk around the unit and scrutinised a range of pupils' work jointly with staff.

Main findings

At the conclusion of the monitoring inspection, I shared the main findings of the visit with you and also, more briefly, with all staff at the unit. I was pleased to note that progress has been made by the unit in bringing about improvement in the following aspects of its work:

- Led by the senior teacher, significant steps have been taken to improve the systems used to record the progress pupils make towards their targets
- improvements to the way in which pupils' attainment is assessed on entry to the unit is helping to ensure a better focus on pupils' learning needs
- as noted at the recent inspection, most pupils who are admitted to the unit settle quickly and, despite their often fragmented educational experiences, begin to make better progress and attend more regularly.

However, despite these improvements, leaders have not made enough progress in tackling the most important areas for improvement identified at the recent inspection. There has been too little impact from actions taken to improve teaching and strengthen leadership at the unit. In order to accelerate the pace of improvement you must, as a matter of urgency, ensure more effective action is taken to:

- Improve the improvement plan by making explicit how it will address the areas for improvement from the recent inspection. In addition, the plan must identify clearly measurable criteria by which the effectiveness of actions taken can be judged, together with appropriate milestones so that the progress made in improving the unit can be evaluated. The current plan is much too generic and is not fit for purpose
- improve the rigour and frequency with which teaching is monitored, ensuring a more effective focus on pupils' learning and progress, and make sure that teachers receive detailed feedback that helps them improve
- work together as a staff to clarify the features of 'good' and better teaching and use this as the basis for monitoring activities, teachers' professional development and work undertaken with partner providers. The current policy for teaching and learning is too unwieldy to be effective and does not state precisely and concisely enough the agreed features of effective practice
- strengthen the impact of performance management by ensuring that targets for staff are measurable and sharply focussed on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils
- ensure that all pupils receive appropriately challenging work that helps them to make better progress. As the recent inspection also noted, pupils are too often given work that is too easy or requires them to repeat work unnecessarily. This is particularly the case for more-able pupils

- consider ways in which the organisation of the unit can be further developed to prepare pupils more effectively for their next steps in education, employment or training. The existing primary-based approach is not fully effective in helping pupils to develop the skills they will need for their future lives. As a result, too many younger pupils fail to re-integrate successfully to their mainstream schools.

In addition, members of the management committee and the local authority must provide more effective strategic direction and develop a vision for the unit so that it can be a highly effective provider for vulnerable pupils across the authority. Although a move to new buildings is anticipated in May 2014, the role and purpose of the unit within this broader framework of alternative provision needs urgently to be clarified.

HMI will conduct a monitoring visit in the summer term following the relocation of the unit to new buildings. During the visit, HMI will evaluate the impact of actions undertaken by leaders and managers, members of the management committee and the local authority in response to the weaknesses and improvement points noted above. In addition, Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the unit until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You are beginning to develop partnerships with neighbouring secondary units although much of this is recent. The work of a senior leader from Dyke House School has provided some initial support for you in undertaking lesson observations and work scrutiny and this represents a positive start to addressing the unit's weaknesses. Plans are in place to further develop links with English Martyrs RC School & Sixth Form College to provide help with curriculum development but these are not yet established. You should also, as soon as possible, identify an effective pupil referral unit which can offer you effective support to make essential improvements.

The local authority accepts that it has not, in the past, ensured a rigorous focus on the needs of the unit or responded decisively enough to emerging concerns. However, in response to the findings of the recent inspection, the local authority is now providing a greater level of challenge and support. However, reluctance on the part of the unit to engage with the local authority has reduced the effectiveness of the support provided.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the management committee, the Director of Children's Services for Hartlepool and as below.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Management Committee
- Local authority – including where the unit is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the unit has a sixth form
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled units
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the unit has a foundation