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Mrs Francesca Cannarella
Interim Headteacher
Cheshire East Pupil Referral Unit
The Oakley Centre
West Street
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Cheshire
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Dear Mrs Cannarella

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cheshire East Pupil Referral Unit

Following my visit to your school on 4 June 2014, 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 January 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection which judged the school to require special measures, five full-time members of teaching staff have left the school and five temporary teachers have been employed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the inspection the leadership team focused on eradicating inadequate teaching and stabilising the staff team to improve the quality and consistency of provision for the students. The senior leadership team has been reorganised and clear roles and responsibilities allocated to address the key areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection report. The special educational needs coordinator is more effective in moving students quickly to appropriate provision and reducing the number of students attending on a part-time basis. Behaviour logs introduced to monitor students' responses and engagement in class show improvement. Analysis of the logs is being reported to staff: as a result, follow-up action is swifter regarding students' positive and negative behaviour. Attendance is still too low. Meetings to discuss students' progress are now held more regularly and teachers target gaps in students' knowledge, skills and understanding more effectively. Weekly training sessions for teachers and teaching assistants focus on setting work at the right level for students of different abilities. However, there is still work to be done on making the best use of teaching assistants in class; improving the teaching of basic reading, writing and mathematical skills and developing these skills across the curriculum. Although staffing is more stable than at the time of the previous inspection, there is still uncertainty about the long-term contractual arrangements of many staff, including most senior leaders. This does not bode well for long-term consistency and rapid development of the pupil referral unit.

The leadership team evaluated the quality of alternative providers and, as a result, focused on improving the range of subjects offered by providing design technology and media studies to motivate and engage students. However, teachers continue to deal with inadequate resources, in an unsuitable venue: these hamper progress for the students. An extra site has been identified as a possible future base and is currently being used by a small number of students. However, neither the governing body nor the local authority can give any definite answers about the future of the unit.

The external review of the governing body has been slow to start and is in the early stage so any impact has yet to be realised. The governing body has four vacancies and has one parent representative: this should be addressed alongside the recommendations from the review of governance. The budget deficit has now been resolved. One governor has made three monitoring visits to the school to look at attendance and pupil premium funding (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or who are looked after by the local authority) and relayed information back to the governing body. The impact of the pupil premium funding has been completed by the acting deputy headteacher for the governors' information. The Chair is aware that the website does not meet regulations and this is being addressed.

The interim headteacher has visited some of the referring schools to offer support and improve liaison between the providers. The local authority has rightly identified the need for a strategic review of the provision for excluded students in Cheshire East to include the role of the pupil referral unit, alternative providers and the need for all referring schools to be involved in the process. The local authority is supporting the school by providing training to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and meeting monthly to discuss the progress towards the removal of special measures. The local authority has worked closely with the senior leaders to compile the statement of action and the school's action plan. Although the local authority's statement of action is compliant it lacks rigour regarding timescales; identification of people responsible for the actions, monitoring and evaluation; clear, quantifiable success criteria are sometimes absent. The school's action plan does not contain enough prioritised, logically sequenced actions and lacks rigour in the same aspects as the local authority's plan.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

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, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh
Her Majesty's Inspector