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Miss Pam Ridgwell
Fordway Centre
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Ashford
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Dear Miss Ridgwell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fordway Centre

Following my visit to your unit on 11 June 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 January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the management committee and 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. Leaders should take immediate action to:

- work together to improve the unit improvement plan by identifying who will lead, what actions will take place by whom and clarifying how success will be measured.
- improve the effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching by making sure that there is a more explicit focus on pupils' learning and progress. In addition, ensure that teachers receive detailed feedback on how to improve.
- ensure that members of the management committee receive the training required to enable them to meet statutory duties, including that related to the safer recruitment of staff.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the Chair of the Management Board, a representative of the local authority and an external consultant, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the unit's action plan. I scrutinised other unit documentation including records of leaders' monitoring activity and minutes from the management committee. I joined you on a tour of the unit and visited every class, taking the opportunity to look at pupils' work.

Context

This visit took place within the context of local authority proposals to federate with a neighbouring secondary PRU. No firm decision has been reached.

One part-time teacher was absent. One part-time teacher, with responsibility for Year 1 and Year 2 has left. Two full-time class teachers have left, one with responsibility for Year 3 and Year 4, and one in Year 5 and Year 6. Temporary cover is in place in all three classes either on a full-time or part-time basis.

Since the previous inspection the Vice-Chair of the Management Committee and two other members have resigned and left. Two new members have been recruited, a staff representative and a parent representative. Despite recent additions, the committee remains significantly undersubscribed.

Main findings

Leaders, members of the management committee and local authority officers are not working together effectively. Since the last inspection, the unit action plan has been re-written and now includes appropriate actions. It is unclear who is leading on actions and who is monitoring their impact. As a result, leaders are unnecessarily repeating some tasks or not completing others. Leaders do not routinely share their evaluations of the actions they are taking. Consequently, the pace of improvement is slow.

Since the section 5 inspection you have established new and suitable systems for evaluating the quality of teaching. You have conducted appropriate short visits to lessons and looked at pupils' work. However, there is no formal cycle of lesson observations. Teachers have not received timely feedback on how to improve their skills and as a result, the quality of teaching is not improving. Moreover, staffing arrangements remain uncertain with the majority of classes taught by temporary teachers.

A new data tracking system means that teachers' have a growing understanding of how well pupils are learning and the standards they are achieving. You now hold

regular meetings with teachers to discuss the progress that pupils are making. However, teachers are not using this information accurately to plan activities for pupils. Consequently, sometimes the work is too hard. When this is the case, pupils struggle to complete tasks successfully.

You and the teaching staff have appropriately revised the curriculum. There are stimulating themed activities, including history weeks and gardening days. Consequently pupils say they now enjoy learning more. In addition, you have introduced a new approach to marking. Pupils work shows they are now receiving more detailed feedback and they now respond regularly to comments. This is beginning to help them develop their understanding.

Since the inspection, you have developed appropriate systems to support pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Positive relationships between staff and pupils are contributing to pupils spending more time fully included in learning activities. Pupils are encouraged to make good choices about their actions and language. However, inconsistencies remain and on occasion, poor behaviour persists. For example, during the visit, the inspector observed a pupil using bad language which adults did not challenge.

You have established well-judged systems to track pupils' attendance more thoroughly. As a result, leaders have a greater awareness of patterns of absence. However, when a pupil's attendance falls, leaders have been slow to respond. Consequently, persistent absence is rising and attendance overall has continued to decline.

The management committee meets regularly and the Chair has completed appropriate training. As a result, members are now able to challenge unit leaders more effectively. However, training in safer recruitment procedures for committee members is urgently required. At the time of my visit, members were keen to recruit a full complement of permanent teaching staff but members had not received the necessary training. Currently, the management committee has too many unfilled vacancies and members struggle to meet statutory requirements. HMI will return to the unit at the beginning of the autumn term, to provide further support and challenge.

External support

Since the last inspection, officers of the local authority have provided some well-judged support. For example, advisory visits have helped leaders to develop better systems for monitoring attendance. Leaders would now benefit from additional support in improving the quality of teaching.

The local authority is considering plans to federate with a local secondary PRU. However, with no firm decision, there is a climate of uncertainty among the

management committee and staff. Plans need to be shared and agreed so that all staff can concentrate fully on the business of securing the necessary improvements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Management Committee, the Director of Children's Services for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector