

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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10 July 2014

Mrs Helen Johnson
Headteacher
West Cumbria Learning Centre
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CA14 4PJ

Dear Mrs Johnson

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Cumbria Learning Centre

Following my visit to your centre on 9 July 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 centre's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the centre became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The centre is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The centre may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Build leadership capacity and develop a clear succession plan so that leadership is distributed across the centre and is not over-reliant on the headteacher or external support by:
 - taking swift action to ensure an effective leadership team is in place which is rigorously held to account by the management committee
 - developing middle leaders by ensuring all teachers and support staff have a progression plan for their professional development and that its impact is rigorously checked.
- Ensure leaders and managers fully evaluate the impact of their actions to improve the centre by effectively checking key areas such as:
 - the attendance of all groups of students
 - the longer-term success of those students who reintegrate back into mainstream school and those students who leave the centre at the end of Key Stage 4
 - the number and type of incidents relating to the behaviour of students while at the centre
 - the small, but significant, steps in progress made by students who attend the centre for either short periods of time or on a part-time basis.
- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 in order to accelerate students' progress and lift their attainment by:
 - ensuring planned changes to the curriculum are implemented fully and support students to gain appropriate qualifications
 - giving staff the opportunity to see outstanding practice in other schools and monitoring the impact of actions taken as a result on students' progress
 - ensuring that good practices already seen in some areas of the centre are shared effectively across the centre: for example, in teachers' marking, teachers' planning, the use of detailed small-steps assessment to identify students' progress and the use of classroom displays to support learning.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of management maybe improved. The external review of governance should also include a specific focus on the impact of student premium spending.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the centre.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 July 2014.

Evidence

I observed the centre's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the interim deputy headteacher, students, the Chair of the Management Committee and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There are currently 28 students on roll across Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. A counsellor has been appointed for three days a week to support students at the centre.

Achievement of students at the centre

The centre is better focused on tracking individual students' attendance, behaviour and academic attainment. As a result information is now held on a centralised system to enable staff to analyse the data and target support for those students not making expected progress. However, this tracking system is still being developed and staff have yet to interrogate the data fully to enable them to have strong evidence of where support for students is most needed. Staff know the students well and have weekly meetings to discuss the barriers to students' learning and offer solutions. They are aware that the next step is a thorough evaluation of the impact of interventions on accelerating progress for students.

Academic baseline assessments are robust and the progress of students is compared to their prior attainment as well as their position when they join the centre. Re-assessments to enable progress to be measured occur every six weeks due to the short-term nature of many of the placements at the centre. A new programme has been introduced to make accurate assessments of students' behaviour and to recommend appropriate interventions. Teachers assess students' attainment at the end of each half-term and record this information; however, teachers are not fully involved in analysing the progress of pupils in individual subjects so that teaching can be adapted to accelerate progress. Teachers moderate students' work within the centre and with one other school to ensure greater accuracy and consistency.

Since September, 22 students have returned to mainstream schools and the information which is provided on students' entry and exit from the centre is more detailed and robust to support their transition.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is continuously and consistently monitored by the headteacher and supported through a comprehensive training programme. As a result teachers' marking, planning and use of classroom displays to support learning have improved. The marking policy has been updated and students regularly respond to feedback, learn from their mistakes and improve their work. Students can earn rewards for high-quality work and this provides motivation for them. However, links with other schools to improve practice and observe good and better teaching have stalled.

Students exhibited a pride in their work during my visit and could clearly explain the progress they are making in their behaviour, attitude to learning and the development of their skills and knowledge. For example, some students brought good quality art work to show me and others wanted me to see how they had produced a healthy plate of food as part of their science lesson on nutrition. Staff have raised their expectations of what students can achieve and this is having a positive effect on students' self-esteem.

Behaviour and safety of students

The behaviour and attitudes of the students during my visit were positive. Students were polite to each other and willing to talk to me positively about the centre during their social time as well as during lessons. They were keen to point out the physical changes to the learning environment: for example, the improved dining hall, which encourages positive interaction between peers and staff through the use of board games, and the new climbing boulder and enclosed football/basketball pitch, which have been provided in response to the students' request. The culture of collaboration and consultation between staff and students was reflected in the positive atmosphere around the building.

Increased pastoral support through the appointment of a school counsellor and a variety of behaviour intervention sessions is proving successful. Students I spoke to during my visit commented on their improved ability to reflect on their behaviour and exercise more self-control as a result of increased pastoral support.

All behaviour incidents are recorded and held on a central system which tracks incidents and the sanctions issued. Although weekly meetings take place to discuss incidents and interventions the data is not sufficiently analysed to check for patterns which could inform future developments within the centre.

Attendance remains too low even though some students' attendance has improved with the introduction of higher aspirations for attendance and attendance related rewards. The centre uses a variety of strategies to improve attendance; it has good links with the local authority attendance officer and communicates regularly with parents to encourage their support.

The quality of leadership in and management of the centre

The senior leadership team's roles and responsibilities are clear and this enables the management committee to hold leaders to account. Middle leaders have recently reviewed their areas of responsibility to contribute to whole centre evaluation. There is increased accountability amongst staff, including the headteacher, through a more robust performance-management system. Staff attendance has improved and there is a positive approach by staff who value clear leadership and shared systems and procedures.

The headteacher has developed a wide network of potential support for the centre. She has rightly focused on putting systems and procedures into place to collect data and ensure greater consistency across the centre. However, there is an urgent need to analyse the data and evaluate the actions taken by staff in the centre to measure the impact on the

outcomes for students. The centre's self-evaluation requires further evaluative evidence to make a robust judgement of the current situation and future developments.

The management committee has been restructured and has support from the National Leader of Education linked to the centre to review its governance and improve the reporting of the impact of pupil premium. The committee has asked for increased analysis of data so they receive a clear summary of students' progress across all academic areas as well as their progress in non-academic areas to enable them to better challenge the rates of progress and offer support where necessary.

External support

The general advisor to the centre has changed and the new advisor has joined the management committee. He meets regularly with the headteacher and monitors progress of the centre against its improvement plan and reports on this at the full management committee meetings. The local authority continues to support the management committee to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of support and challenge directed at the centre.