

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus
Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9153
Direct email: naik.sandhu@serco.com



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Ms Nicola Meakin
Acting Headteacher
Harbour Pupil Referral Unit
Saturn Close
Lowestoft
Suffolk
NR32 4TD

Dear Ms Meakin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harbour

Following my visit to your school on 13 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 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 November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

While senior leaders and managers are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection, the loss of confidence that has arisen between leaders and managers and the local authority over proposed changes to the unit's intake is a barrier to continued improvement. As a result, further action should be taken to:

- improve how both the local authority and the leaders and managers at Harbour communicate and work together to ensure the unit's provision best meets local needs
- ensure staff receive rapid support and training so that they have the skills and experience necessary to manage safely the proposed increased age of the student cohort.

Evidence

During the inspection I held meetings with you and the special educational needs coordinator, with two members of the management committee, a group of students

and a representative of the local authority. I also spoke to the County Manager for Social Inclusion by phone. I evaluated the school improvement plan, looked at minutes of the management committee and scrutinised a range of monitoring and assessment information. We visited all classes, looked at students' books and spoke to some of them about their work.

Context

At the time of this visit, the executive headteacher was absent and you were providing leadership of the unit. Since the inspection, a new teacher who has responsibility for leading mathematics has joined the unit.

Main findings

Within the unit you have made several changes in response to the inspection. A new action plan has been implemented and objectives and actions are appropriate to address the areas for improvement identified. Milestones and measures to monitor whether you are successful in making the necessary improvements are however, not sufficiently rigorous to enable leaders and managers to evaluate progress precisely. The English and mathematics subject leaders have put in place plans to address weaknesses and to enable them to monitor how well improvements are being made. There is a similar lack of specific measures for monitoring progress in these plans.

You have changed the structure and organisation of the school day so that students work in class bases and spend more time with their 'base' teachers. This is providing greater continuity for students who are working well with staff to understand and manage their own behaviour more positively. Arrangements are also deepening relationships and allowing students to engage more in discussion about their needs. Although these changes are recent, students say they feel more secure and enjoy working in these groups.

Weekly meetings for teaching staff with a clear schedule for providing training relating to the aspects of teaching that require improvement are now in place. Through these, you have introduced new procedures for making sure students are clear about what they are expected to learn, and have implemented a new marking policy so that teachers respond to students' learning more precisely. While we saw some good examples of marking in students' books, for example in science, not all teachers are using the new procedures well enough. Students said in discussion that when the new systems for recording and managing their learning and behaviour are used well by staff, improvements are made to their learning.

You have taken rapid action to improve attendance by carefully monitoring why some students have high rates of absence. Your case studies demonstrate that the increased involvement of students' families is improving how regularly they attend. The unit's business manager has undertaken a detailed analysis of students who are eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding for disadvantaged

students) and the management committee are determining the best way to fully secure this funding. The local authority has provided some funding to facilitate support however; there is still a considerable margin between students' entitlement and the funding the unit actually receives. Working with the business manager you have made sure members of the management committee have more detailed information relating to how this pupil premium and the primary sports funding is spent. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this recently accessed funding on students' achievement and well-being.

Systems for tracking the progress students make have been improved. You establish detailed evidence of how well students are achieving when they join the unit and are frequently measuring the progress they are making. This is enabling teachers to make adjustments more quickly to match students' achievement and to plan to meet their needs more accurately.

The management committee provide committed and knowledgeable support for leaders. Members have arranged their visits to monitor the impact of the actions you are taking to bring about improvement. For example, they have already visited to see how well the restructured day is influencing improving behaviour. In order to challenge leaders and monitor improvement, the committee has implemented an extra meeting each term to consider key information relating to how well the school is improving. For example, progress information, attendance figures and information about how well teaching is improving is shared regularly at these meetings.

External support

Since the inspection, the local authority adviser working with the unit has provided support for action planning. The local authority has written to the management committee of Harbour identifying concerns about how well the provision meets local needs. This has caused some confusion among management committee members who state they were not aware of the issues raised. Too much time is being spent managing decisions about which students the unit is expected to provide placements for in the future. As a result, time has been wasted and leaders and the local authority have not acted well enough to move forward quickly in the strong partnership necessary to secure rapid improvement as the unit changes. The situation has also proved to be unsettling for staff because they are not clear about the intentions for the changed provision, and as yet, there is no clear planning to properly facilitate these changes. The lack of preparation and training necessary for the unit to adapt to take predominantly older students from a small number of local schools presents potential risks to student and staff safety.

HMI will visit in the summer term to determine the progress made and will provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector