

15 May 2015

Mrs Irene Pritchard  
Headteacher  
Launchpad Centre  
St Helens PACE  
Derbyshire Hill Road  
St Helens  
WA9 2LH

Dear Mrs Pritchard

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Launchpad Centre, St. Helens**

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders along with the management committee are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen the action plan by giving specific detail about what success will look like, so that leaders can judge unambiguously the impact of their actions on improving the outcomes of all pupils in the school
- strengthen teaching by providing specific training on what good teaching looks like, so that teachers and, as a result, their students can gain maximum benefit from the sharing of good practice with other schools
- improve the effectiveness of teachers' feedback to students: set additional tasks to test students mastery of skills; provide students with pointers on how students can improve their work
- ensure leaders are able to make accurate judgements about each student's academic and non-academic progress by setting specific targets based on each student's starting point as they start at the centre
- review the overall aims and objectives of Launchpad, so that the management committee can hold leaders to account effectively in relation to the centre's overall impact on students' outcomes.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the teacher coordinator, students and the management committee, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with the school improvement partner and the headteacher designate in order to discuss the school's plans for the future. The school action plan, along with a range of other documentation provided by the school was evaluated. I took the opportunity to visit classrooms and scrutinise a sample of students' work in order to evaluate learning.

## **Context**

The head of the Behaviour And Inclusion Improvement Service has taken lead responsibility for Launchpad due to the long term absence of the incumbent teacher in charge. The management committee has appointed a new permanent leader of Launchpad with effect from 1 September 2015.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have taken appropriate action to improve the quality of teaching as a means of raising standards in the Launchpad Key Stage 3 Centre. Links with other strong schools, including both mainstream and special schools, have begun to lead to improvements in the quality of teaching. Leaders have established a robust system to collect and analyse information about Key Stage 3 students' progress. Frequent progress meetings between leaders and teachers have resulted in teachers planning lessons which are more closely matched to students' specific needs compared to before the inspection.

The raising of standards in English and mathematics has been a priority since the inspection in February 2015. Leaders have made effective use of their contacts with other local mainstream and special schools to enable teachers and, as a result, their students to benefit from the sharing of good practice. Teachers are beginning to use a more systematic approach to their assessment of students' learning. However, some teachers are still not effective in using what they know about individuals' progress to plan their teaching. Consequently students are not always challenged to do their best in all subjects.

Students have also benefitted from their teachers sharing good practice with their colleagues in the primary section of the Launchpad Centre. The Key Stage 3 centre is vibrant and provides an appropriate learning environment. It contains wall displays, which students say they find useful in a range of subjects, and also exhibits students work as a means of celebrating success and encouraging others to work as hard as they can.

Progress meetings between leaders and teachers are held every two weeks. These meetings concentrate on specific areas for improvement, for example teachers' planning for lessons. My discussions with leaders, along with my scrutiny of leaders' records, show that they make good use of data to identify which students are at risk of falling behind. Although leaders' records of what students can do are robust, records do not give a clear indication of what each student should achieve, academically and non-academically, by the time they leave the centre. Success criteria in terms of students' attainment and personal and social development are not specific enough to gauge precisely the progress students make based on their starting points.

Leaders have put in place a system to ensure that students regularly receive feedback on the standard of their work. Evidence in students' work books shows that most teachers identify accurately what each student has done well. However, feedback is not consistently helpful because too often comments made by teachers do not identify how a student can improve. Furthermore, teachers do not routinely challenge students to improve their work, nor do they test students' mastery of skills by setting additional questions to test their understanding in other contexts. This means that students do not always make the progress they are capable of. This is a concern of those students spoken to as they fear being left behind by their peers in mainstream schools.

Leaders' self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the Launchpad Key Stage 3 Centre has strengthened since the inspection. The systematic approach to collecting and recording information about each student is beginning to pay dividends. The management team, which includes several headteachers of local good and outstanding schools is strong and knows exactly what the centre needs to do to become good. The management committee's robust system of monitoring the performance of the centre as a whole, is ensuring that centre leaders remain focussed on improving students' outcomes.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The school is being supported well by both the local authority and a number of other schools. Leaders have been effective in establishing links with a range of local good and outstanding schools some of which are led by members of the management committee. The local authority was instrumental in the secondment of the acting teacher in charge of the centre and has also supported the management committee in the appointment of permanent leader of Launchpad.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for St. Helens.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

**Her Majesty's Inspector**