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Mrs Francesca Cannarella
Interim Headteacher
Cheshire East Pupil Referral Unit
The Oakley Centre
West Street
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 2 PZ

Dear Mrs Cannarella

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cheshire East Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 June 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire East.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - eradicating all inadequate teaching
 - making sure teachers plan lessons that motivate students because the content is inherently interesting and they see a relevance in what they are learning and so their attitudes to learning are consistently good
 - teachers setting work that is at the right level for students of different abilities so that it is neither too easy nor too difficult
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are always deployed where they can make the most difference to students' learning.

- Improve students' rates of progress, especially in English and consequently their attainment by:
 - improving the teaching of basic reading, writing and mathematical skills and ensuring that work in other subjects gives students plenty of opportunities to use and apply these skills
 - getting students to work hard and think things out for themselves
 - insisting that students always present their work to a good standard.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the management committee, so that improvement is driven forward at a rapid rate by:
 - reducing the level of supply staff as quickly as possible and making swift decisions about the appointment of permanent senior leaders
 - rapidly introducing a rigorous system for managing the performance of teachers ensuring that all students on part-time tuition programmes have a full-time education and so that attendance improves further
 - analysing data on students' progress and attainment so that leaders know how well different groups of students are doing and making sure improvement plans are based on these findings
 - making sure students are prepared well for reintegration into mainstream schools so that they very rarely have to return to the unit
 - ensuring that the management committee has a full and accurate view of students' achievements, including the use and impact of pupil premium funding, how teachers' performance is managed and how this relates to the pay they receive
 - undertaking an external review of the management committee, to include a specific focus on the impact of pupil premium funding, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance can be improved.

- The management committee should:
 - make representation to the local authority in order to secure a suitable and permanent building venue for the unit
 - ensure that the plans to address the budget deficit are realised.

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

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, groups of pupils, and the representatives from the local authority. The inspector also held a telephone discussion with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board.

Context

An interim executive board, made up of five experienced leaders in education, has replaced the management committee. The headteacher has resigned from her post with effect from 17 July 2015. One teacher has returned to work following a long term absence.

The local authority plans to close the school's current site in December 2015. The local authority has consulted with the school about plans to re-locate the school to permanent building in September 2016. A building design has been agreed and a possible site has been identified. Building plans are at an early planning stage and are yet to receive full planning permission. The local authority's re-location proposal includes providing temporary accommodation for the school. The local authority has identified a range of options for temporary accommodation.

Plans to convert the school to an academy are in their infancy. Proposed sponsors are being considered by the interim executive board. The proposal for conversion to an academy has the support of the local authority. However, a date for conversion has not been set.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Leaders' own data show that students' progress overall is not consistently strong. Information in the school's records, such as case study files, along with evidence of students' work demonstrate a strong link between poor attendance and weak progress. The school's data show that where students' attendance is higher than average for the school they make better progress than those with lower attendance. For example, one Year 11 student with attendance of almost 90% has made good progress and is on target to gain a wide range of appropriate qualifications including good grades in GCSE English and mathematics. However, another Year 11 student with very low attendance has made poor progress. This student is on target to gain only a very few qualifications with low grades; this is well below his capability.

Students, across the school, were observed to be making strong progress when they were engaged fully in their learning. Typically, when students feel there is a strong purpose for their learning, they are enthusiastic and active participants in their lessons. As a consequence, students are then keen to learn and are attentive to the adults working with them. For example, one student made rapid progress in understanding a range of personal anger management strategies. This student was

engrossed in his learning because he recognised the topic could support his move back to a mainstream school. Conversely, students were also observed, in a few lessons, making little or no progress because they switched-off almost immediately the lesson started. These students did not see a purpose for their learning because they could not relate the activity they were expected to complete to either their own needs or to the subject being studied.

Students who attend the off-site provision, visited by the inspector, make strong progress overall because they see a purpose in their learning. Students' attendance at the off-site provision is high. Almost all of the students have either already achieved, or are on target to achieve, a vocational qualification at an appropriate level. Examples of qualifications studied include: CACHE Level 2 in Child Care, Babysitting and Parenting; BTEC Diploma Level 1 in Construction Skills and BTEC Diploma Level 2 in Work Skills. Students are highly motivated to work towards mathematics and English qualifications at an appropriate level. Students who attend off-site alternative provision, on the whole, achieve well because the curriculum is aligned to their specific needs.

The quality of teaching

Some improvements in the quality of teaching, reported at the previous inspection, have not been built on rapidly enough. In several lessons observed, teachers missed opportunities to check what students already knew about a subject. Also, on a few occasions, teachers did not ensure students understood the purpose of, or the benefit they would get, from the learning. This led to students being disinterested and making slow progress. Some students find work either too difficult or too easy because it is sometimes not closely matched to their specific needs. For example, one student absconded from the classroom because the text he was given, as an introduction to the lesson, was far too difficult for him to read and understand.

Strategies to broaden students' range of reading and to improve their reading ability have not been embedded into the curriculum effectively. The opportunities for students to read for themselves text which is well matched to their level of ability are few and far between. In lessons visited by the inspector, students were not given the chance to read aloud, nor were they questioned effectively on their understanding of texts. Consequently, students have a reluctance to read in order to improve their understanding which, in turn, is restricting their progress.

Expectations are not consistently high enough because a few teachers do not challenge students to do their best all of the time. This is demonstrated in the quality of teachers' feedback to students. Teachers, on the whole, follow closely the whole school marking policy by identifying what a student has done well and what the next step for improvement is. However, this good practice is not built on because teachers generally miss too many opportunities to either explain specifically how identified improvements can be made or to give examples or models of what a good answer looks like. Opportunities to set students challenging questions or tasks

in order to test learning or to stretch students even further, especially when a student has completed a set task, are also missed by teachers.

Pockets of strong practice can be seen across the school. Where teachers set high expectations and adapt their plans to the specific needs and interests of students, signs of rapid progress are evident. For example, students' work in design and technology and art is of the highest standard because teaching is effective in providing learning experiences which capture students' interests. In a mathematics lesson, students were observed working effectively at their own level, using graphs to prove correlation between data. The teaching assistant was effective because she challenged students to think for themselves rather than giving answers. The teacher used his assessment of each student's understanding and ability, to set work which matched their needs well. Students were engaged in their work because they understood the purpose of their learning. Consequently, this group of students progressed swiftly in this lesson.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There is a strong link between behaviour and attendance and the curriculum as a whole at the school. Behaviour and attendance are best when students have a clear purpose for their learning. Examples of good behaviour and attendance can be seen when students are working towards academic or vocational qualifications which are linked closely to their next steps. These students are motivated to learn and their positive behaviour and good attendance contributes to their rapid progress in many cases. In some instances though, students' behaviour and attendance and, as a consequence, their rate of progress, begin to deteriorate because their planned return to high school, or to a special school, is not implemented swiftly enough.

Attendance across the school remains stubbornly low and is a barrier to progress. Leaders have put in place appropriate systems to monitor attendance and to support those who find it difficult to engage. However, the curriculum does not motivate enough students to attend well over time. Also, the environment created at the school is not conducive to strong learning or good attendance. The combination of small rooms, poor ventilation, confined corridors and a lack of open space, creates an oppressive environment which gives very little opportunity for creativity in teaching.

Safeguarding procedures are generally strong. The school has established effective links with a wide range of other agencies and this contributes well to keeping students safe. Staff are well trained in the safeguarding of children and update training takes place frequently. Since the last inspection, leaders have taken appropriate action to ensure students cannot be locked in classrooms either by mistake or against their will.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders have taken action, following the last inspection, to bolster their use of data as a tool to track and monitor rates of improvement in students' progress. Leaders also draw on a wider range of data to enable them validate the extent of improvements made. However, this model does not enable leaders to track and evaluate the performance of different groups of students. Also, leaders are not yet using this information to form judgements about each student's rate of progress. Consequently, the interim executive board does not have a precise grasp of the extent of progress made at individual or whole level.

Leaders do not monitor teaching with sufficient rigour. Joint lesson observations between the inspector and senior leaders, along with the scrutiny of leaders' records of their observations of lessons, demonstrate that leaders have an over generous view on the quality of teaching. This is because leaders have focused on ensuring teachers meet specific non-negotiable requirements at the expense evaluating how well teaching impacts on students' learning and progress. Therefore, some teachers have not honed their skills in adapting their lessons to build on what students already know and can do. In turn, a good proportion of students do not make the progress they are capable of.

Records of meetings of the interim executive board show that they are increasing in their effectiveness. The board provides an appropriate balance between support for the school and challenge of leaders. Records show that the board is relentless in its pursuit of high quality data which will help them to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions on students' achievement.

Staff spoken with remain positive about the future of the school. They feel that they are supported well by leaders who provide a wide range of opportunities for professional development. However, uncertainty about the future of the school remains a hindrance to rapid improvement. The interim executive board are aware that timely action is required to ensure all stakeholders are well-informed about plans for the re-location of the school, including any temporary arrangements, the impact of the school becoming an academy and the permanency of their positions.

External support

Leaders are working effectively with the local authority to ensure plans for the re-location of the school remain on track and are followed with urgency.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should take additional action to:

- ensure an interim executive board member is identified as the designated governor responsible for safeguarding

- ensure the designated governor responsible for safeguarding monitors systematically the school's procedures for safeguarding, for example by making monthly checks of the school's records relating to physical interventions
- work closely with the local authority to ensure all students, identified as having made appropriate progress, are able move quickly to mainstream education, or to a special school.