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Mr Matt McCluskey
Acting Headteacher
Denewood Learning Centre
113 Forest Road West
Nottingham
NG7 4ES

Dear Mr McCluskey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Denewood Learning Centre

Following my visit with Clare Cossor, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on the 2–3 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 also attached.

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

The centre is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.
The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.
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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham City.

Yours sincerely

Phil Harrison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to increase the progress pupils make and raise their achievement by:
 - supporting teachers to make all lessons as stimulating and interesting as the best, so that pupils want to learn and do not try to leave the classroom
 - making sure that adults do not do the work for the pupils
 - making sure that teachers take account of what pupils have learned already so that their expectations of what pupils should achieve in lessons are high enough, and more-able pupils do not mark time by doing work that is too easy
 - raising pupils' attendance.

- As a matter of urgency, improve pupils' behaviour and the way it is managed so that pupils feel safe by:
 - insisting and checking that staff at all times follow the centre's policy for dealing with inappropriate behaviour
 - substantially reducing the use of physical intervention and restraint
 - ceasing to use the isolation rooms as places of punishment and confinement
 - providing training for staff in effective techniques to deal with unacceptable behaviour and prevent incidents from escalating
 - developing alternative strategies to exclusion and the use of part-time timetables
 - making sure the reports written following incidents are a full and accurate account of what happened
 - analysing incident reports promptly to identify triggers and trends and the lessons that can be learned.

- Improve leadership, management and governance by:
 - making sure that a full audit of all aspects of the centre's work around safeguarding, and health and safety is carried out, and that rapid action is taken to deal with omissions and breaches where needed so that all statutory requirements are met
 - tightening up the arrangements for checking that staff follow and implement agreed policies and procedures

- seeking and taking account of the views of pupils about their environment and the way they are treated at the centre
- making sure that plans for improvement reflect the centre's most pressing needs and contain realistic targets.

An external review of governance, including specific focus on the centre's use of the pupil premium and the impact of the primary school physical education and sport funding, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2–3 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the centre's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher and other members of staff with various responsibilities. Inspectors visited the main centre site and four of the 10 alternative provisions currently used by the centre. The inspectors met also with representatives of the interim executive board, which is responsible for the governance of the centre. The inspectors held discussions with pupils at the centre and those who attend alternative provision. The inspection focused upon how leaders and managers are improving the safety and behaviour of pupils and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection in March 2015 the centre has appointed a new assistant headteacher and a new lead member of staff for behaviour. There are several members of staff who are currently not at work. Their duties are being covered by supply staff. There has been an increase in the number of teachers employed by the centre. There are now more pupils being educated at the centre than at the time of the last monitoring inspection.

The interim executive board also oversees Unity Learning Centre, which provides alternative education for Key Stage 4 pupils in Nottingham City. Unity Learning Centre was last inspected by Ofsted in December 2013, at which point it was judged to require improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The overall quality of teaching at the Denewood Learning Centre has improved since the last monitoring inspection. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement in this aspect of the centre's work. A small proportion of teaching is not yet as effective as it should be. Leaders do not have enough information about the quality of teaching experienced by pupils who attend the alternative provisions.

The Denewood Learning Centre site is now a place for learning. Staff have made a considerable effort to ensure the centre looks and feels like a school. Work is now on display in classrooms and corridors. Pupils have direct access to the equipment they need for their lessons. Pupils receive feedback about their work, although at times some teachers' handwriting is difficult to read.

Teachers are using the information from their assessments of pupils' work to prepare lessons to a greater extent than was apparent at the previous monitoring inspection.

Inspectors observed pupils being engaged in work that was stimulating and fun, such as the use of local maps to develop their understanding of co-ordinates in mathematics. As a result of teachers recognising the abilities of pupils more accurately, they are able to direct teaching assistants to support pupils at the right time. Inspectors did not observe any staff completing pupils' work for them.

The special educational needs coordinator has established a useful database which tracks the interventions used to support pupils with additional needs. This is allowing the centre to make informed decisions about the next steps for pupils' learning. The identification of pupils' needs and the provision of support for those who need it has improved since the last monitoring inspection. The centre is now clear about the services which are available to support the additional needs of pupils. This knowledge is helping to ensure some pupils are getting the right support at the right time.

The improving quality of teaching at the Denewood Learning Centre is leading to better outcomes in English, mathematics and science for most pupils. In Key Stage 2 pupils are making stronger progress in mathematics than in reading, writing and science.

In Key Stage 3 pupils are making the best progress in mathematics, followed by reading and writing. Most pupils accessing alternative provisions are not accessing an appropriate science curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The improvements in the centre's arrangements for the care and welfare of the pupils noted at the previous monitoring inspection have been sustained. The centre site is well maintained so that pupils can be kept safe from harm.

The behaviour of pupils at the centre has improved since the last monitoring inspection. In collaboration with all staff the new leader for behaviour provides effective support to pupils in order to improve the management of their own behaviours. Staff are increasingly confident in how to deal with challenging incidents appropriately. The exclusion of pupils is rare.

Pupils are given opportunities to share their views about the quality of education they receive. Inspectors found that leaders are quick to act positively when pupils raise issues of concern.

Since the last monitoring inspection weekly assemblies have been introduced for pupils who attend the Denewood site. These events provide pupils with an opportunity to be rewarded for their hard work and positive behaviour alongside developing their understanding of topical events. Some Key Stage 2 pupils recently attended a Remembrance Day event in the centre of Nottingham. They were highly

commended by members of the public for their behaviour and engagement during the ceremony. The promotion of tolerance and respect is now a strong feature of the centre.

The attendance of pupils has not improved significantly since the last monitoring inspection but there are now better systems in place to monitor and quickly follow up the absence of pupils on a daily basis. The punctuality of pupils who attend the Denewood Learning Centre site has improved.

The recent introduction of a 'buddy' system for older pupils to support younger ones shows early signs of promise. Pupils and staff report that this is helping to promote the self-esteem and confidence of the 'buddy' while providing positive role models for the younger pupils.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher is well respected by the staff team and pupils. He demonstrates a steely determination to improve all aspects of the centre's work for the benefit of pupils. Inspectors were told by several members of staff that they are motivated by the hard work and dedication the acting headteacher displays. The staff team are now enthusiastic and positive about the future of the centre.

Leaders have rightly continued to focus on improving systems to keep pupils safe. However, there has been an increased emphasis on improving the quality of teaching at the centre. Leaders have ensured that regular meetings between staff help to develop their expertise by sharing effective practice. They have also ensured that key issues related to individual pupils are discussed and acted upon. The acting headteacher recognises that the existing centre improvement plan should now be amended to reflect the improvements needed to further improve the quality of teaching.

The interim executive board receive accurate reports from senior staff, which means they have an in-depth understanding of the challenges facing the centre. The members of the board have a wealth of experience and skill in school leadership, organisational improvement and financial management. Their high expectations mean that improvements across the centre are expected to be within the proposed timescales. They have been tenacious in requesting all the information they require and are well placed to support the further progress of the centre's work.

The curriculum offered at the centre contains a variety of subjects, which, when taught well, is leading to the improving progress of pupils. The curriculum offered by some of the alternative providers does not allow pupils the opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a breadth of subjects.

The interim executive board, executive headteacher and acting headteacher have yet to ensure that all pupils receive an appropriate full-time education and that the systems for communicating with alternative providers are secure.

External support

The executive headteacher, who is also a national leader of education, provides significant expertise and experience which is supporting the acting headteacher and the interim executive board with the insight they need to rapidly move the centre forward. The flexibility shown by his own school in providing accommodation and support to a group of Key Stage 2 pupils has resulted in an improvement in their progress, behaviour and attendance.

The local authorities' statement of action is now fit for purpose and provides a useful framework for their regular visits to the centre. They have actively engaged a large number of schools, academies and key local partners in consulting on a strategy to provide good-quality education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs across Nottingham City.

Areas for further improvement identified during the inspection

- Ensure all pupils access an appropriate full-time education.
- As a matter of urgency improve the communication systems regarding the safety, behaviour and progress of pupils that attend alternative provisions.