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Matthew McCluskey
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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 3–4 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

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 third monitoring inspection on 3 March 2016 to 4 March 2016

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, Westbury School and two alternative provisions currently used by the centre. The inspectors met twice with the chair of the interim executive board and held discussions with pupils at the centre and those who attend off-site 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

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. One member of the interim executive board has resigned, however, and an appropriately experienced replacement has been found. The interim executive board is in discussions with the Department for Education and Regional Schools Commissioner regarding the future status of the learning centres.

Staff attendance has slightly improved since the last monitoring inspection.

Senior officers from Nottingham local authority are working closely with all city schools to reduce exclusions and develop new provision for pupils at risk of exclusion across the city.

Leaders use alternative provision for some pupils. The alternative provisions are sourced from a list available from Nottingham City Schools Education Partnership (NCSEP). This organisation states that it inspects alternative provisions annually to ensure that learners are safe and that the quality of provision, including teaching and learning, meets a minimum standard as defined by the city's 1419 partnership.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher continues to have the confidence of the interim executive board, staff and pupils to drive forward the learning centre's improvements. He responded to the areas for improvement identified during the last monitoring inspection by increasing the number of pupils who now access full-time education and by ensuring that the centre's leaders have better-quality information about the alternative providers they use. Members of staff from Denewood Learning Centre are now regular visitors to the alternative providers. The acting headteacher has

also ensured that the centre now receives and uses good-quality information from Nottingham City Schools Education Partnership (NCSEP) regarding their quality assurance of the alternative providers.

The chair of the interim executive board is determined that the decision to become an academy will receive due consideration by the board and that the best interests of pupils will determine the option decided upon. The board meet regularly and the chair is a regular visitor to the learning centre. This means that the board are well informed and this helps them make key decisions in a timely manner. The chair of the board has ensured that the information provided to him by the acting headteacher is accurate by checking it for himself by visiting classrooms. The chair of the board told inspectors that the improved behaviour of pupils observed at the time of the last monitoring inspection has been sustained and that there have been improvements to the quality of teaching at the Denewood site. Inspectors agree with view of the chair of the board.

The interim executive board has successfully managed to reduce the budget deficit of the learning centre. This is helping to ensure the future viability of the provision for pupils and to provide better value for money.

Following the last monitoring inspection the interim executive board has ensured that they receive further information about the learning centre's use of alternative provision. This information has helped them to challenge centre leaders about the appropriate use of these provisions for the benefit of pupils. At the start of this inspection the interim executive board, executive headteacher and acting headteacher were not clear about the registration status of some alternative providers who deliver full-time education to Denewood pupils.

The interim executive board has also ensured that it receives better-quality information about pupils' progress. This has ensured that the interim executive board has a sharper focus on what actions the centre needs to take next to improve outcomes for pupils.

At Denewood Learning Centre there has been a considerable broadening of the curriculum since the last monitoring inspection. This work has helped to engage pupils and to ensure that individual interests and strengths are extended. Younger pupils now have more opportunities to go swimming and older pupils are now able to make better progress in art, music and drama because of the way in which the curriculum has been improved.

The leaders of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 do not yet analyse the outcomes for pupils across their departments. The learning centre does not yet have systems for analysing different groups of pupils, which is hindering the planning for improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching at the Denewood Learning Centre has improved since the last monitoring inspection. During a well-planned English lesson pupils made good progress in developing their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. The teacher used a game involving rulers to make pupils' learning fun and to check how well pupils had understood adjectives, nouns and verbs.

The quality of classroom environments is high across the learning centre because leaders have made their expectations clear to teachers and teaching assistants. Staff usually ensure that appropriate resources are made available for pupils, which helps them to learn well. Younger pupils made good progress in their understanding of homophones as a result of staff creating a positive learning environment and the teacher's brilliantly described examples.

There is still some inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the learning centre. At times, weak planning and preparation mean that activities are not always set at the correct level to enable pupils to make the progress they are capable of. Also, some of the teaching delivered by external tutors is not always of the high quality expected by leaders. As a result, pupils do not always receive the support they need to make the very best gains in their learning.

The systems for tracking the individual progress of pupils are becoming better established and are helping teachers to identify appropriate targets for pupil's learning. These targets are now starting to be woven into the planning of lessons and helping to ensure that pupils make progress. Leaders have started work on a new assessment policy but it is too soon to judge the full impact of this work on improving the learning of pupils.

The school's current information on pupils' progress indicates that older pupils attending the Denewood site are making better progress in mathematics and English than they do in science and computing.

Leaders do not currently have enough information about pupils' progress from most of the alternative providers to establish whether pupils are doing as well as they should in key subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

One inspector described the behaviour of pupils at the Denewood site as 'impressively good'. At the Denewood site pupils are motivated to behave and try their best because staff expectations are clear and pupils enjoy positive relationships with all staff. One teacher told an inspector: 'Our expectations are even higher and they can be because the basics are in place now.'

The lead member of staff responsible for pupil behaviour analyses patterns of behaviour each week and this information is shared with other leaders on a Friday. Key members of staff then work together to devise strategies to improve the behaviour of individual pupils. This level of collaboration is effective and means that pupils' behaviour over time improves significantly. The lead member of staff responsible for behaviour is very proactive on a daily basis; she responds well to incidents and helps to ensure the safety of pupils and staff.

The Westbury School site has 11 pupils on roll. Inspectors observed pupils' conduct to be of the highest order. For example, during a badminton lesson all the pupils demonstrated a thirst to improve their level of skill. The teacher and teaching assistant motivated and engaged all the pupils and gave them regular feedback about their work which helped them to make immediate progress.

Systems to protect children from harm are now embedded into the day-to-day practice of the staff at Denewood Learning Centre. The safeguarding policy has been updated to help staff identify signs of abuse. The records scrutinised by inspectors indicate that referrals to social care about individual pupils is timely and results in effective support for pupils and their families. The health and safety requirements at the centre site continue to be a high priority; any concerns are acted upon quickly. Inspectors looked at two files related to recent staff recruitment. These files demonstrate that rigorous systems are in place to ensure that only suitable staff are employed to work with the pupils.

The weekly assemblies establish and reinforce a clear code of conduct for pupil behaviour. The assembly's deliver uncompromising messages about the expectations of staff and reward pupils if they make the progress expected of them. Pupils respond positively to these occasions and state that they feel valued and cared for. Pupils told inspectors that they like the small size of the provision at the Denewood site and that all the staff are approachable. They stated that the teaching is helping them make progress and improves their attitudes to school.

External support

The executive headteacher, who is also a national leader of education (NLE), continues to provide the acting headteacher and interim executive board with his useful insights and exceptional dedication to improving the life chances of pupils in the provision. The executive headteacher has a precise understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre, which helps everyone connected with the centre to tackle these issues head on and celebrate the progress they are making. The executive headteacher's honesty and integrity is pivotal to the centre's continued effective progress towards removal of special measures.

Local authority officers, including the joint directors of education and school improvement officer, take their responsibility to improve the quality of provision, extremely seriously. The directors of education have engaged well with all schools

in reviewing the provision for pupils who are at risk of exclusion. The school improvement officer continues to rigorously hold Denewood Learning Centre leaders to account for the progress they are making against their action plans. This work is helping to drive improvement and as a result, the wider local authority systems to support the centre's work are also improving.

Areas for further improvement identified during the inspection

- Ensure that all pupils access appropriate full-time education.
- Act swiftly to ensure that all pupils access appropriate provision that is registered with the Department for Education.