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Tony Middleton
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Middleton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sheffield Inclusion Centre

Following my visit to your school on 21 September, 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 March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. The school should take further action to:

- ensure earlier intervention for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion and better re-integration of excluded pupils
- ensure that assessment and teaching consistently identify and meet the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language
- strengthen the systems for monitoring and evaluating pupils' academic progress, including at alternative provision.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, the chair of the management committee, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken

since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and data on attendance and achievement were scrutinised. Visits to three sites looked at provision for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Visits were also made to three out of 30 alternative providers used by the centre: Whirlow Hall Farm, Pathways and the Fir Vale Centre. I spoke to staff and pupils, observed lessons, looked at pupils' work and heard pupils read.

Context

The local authority is re-designing the service to increase the availability and support for pupils vulnerable to exclusion, especially in parts of the city where exclusions are high and attendance low. Leaders aim to increase outreach work to reduce the high level of exclusions in Sheffield. The local authority is beginning to strengthen the role of primary and secondary headteachers in referral and re-integration, and in the leadership, management and monitoring of the centre.

The permanent exclusion of Slovak pupils has increased markedly in Sheffield. Currently, 43 Roma Slovak pupils are permanently excluded, which is exceptionally high. Many Slovak pupils at the centre are recent arrivals to the United Kingdom and are in the early stages of learning English. Excluded Slovak pupils make up 30% of pupils currently on roll at the centre. This is disproportionate.

The executive headteacher, who also leads two special schools for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, has agreed with the local authority to continue as executive headteacher for a further two years. A head of school vacancy is advertised. An assistant headteacher left for promotion. Internal appointments were made to lead Key Stage 3 and special educational needs.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and local authority are working together effectively to improve services for pupils vulnerable to exclusion. The executive headteacher has a clear vision to move support closer to where it is needed and to meet pupils' individual needs earlier and more accurately. The work is complex and improvements are being made incrementally in partnership with Sheffield schools.

A new referral panel includes primary headteachers from local families of schools. It has begun to agree placements, outreach support and re-integration to meet the needs of pupils more accurately and flexibly. In the summer term, all Key Stage 2 pupils were re-integrated back into their mainstream schools. Secondary headteachers have agreed to reduce the use of permanent exclusion, where possible, and to increase the rate of re-integration. At the end of the summer term, the number of pupils being re-integrated began to increase.

Improved financial management has led to more sustainable policies for charging schools for places at the centre. This enables leaders to plan a wider range of

specialist appointments to meet pupils' needs. Leaders are beginning to adapt staffing structures and systems to provide outreach work and more short-term and fewer long-term placements. Changes to timetables enable staff to teach their subject specialism across the different sites.

Overall attendance at the centre has improved over the last year. Two thirds of pupils have better attendance than at the last school they attended. Attendance improved most markedly at Key Stage 4 and by White British pupils. Attendance at Key Stage 3, and by Slovak pupils, has increased but remains exceptionally low.

Leaders report that more rigorous procedures ensure that contact is made with every pupil, every day, wherever they are based. All pupils now have a full-time timetable, including pupils educated partly at home. Creating more centre sites closer to where excluded pupils live is designed to improve attendance. Community adult learning at centre sites provides more opportunities to engage with parents of excluded pupils.

Fixed-term exclusions from the centre continue to reduce and are much lower than in the past, reflecting improvements in the management of behaviour. The recently opened sites provide a better environment for learning. Staff are applying behaviour policies more consistently, which helps pupils to manage their own conduct better.

Leaders are beginning to develop more effective systems to check on, and support, teaching and learning. They recognise that teaching is still not consistent across the school. In a primary class, the pupils, including Slovak pupils, were concentrating well in a practical mathematics lesson on measurement, and learning to use the language of comparison. In another class, however, pupils were not as well engaged as they did not have enough to do.

In the new Key Stage 3 centre, pupils explained their learning in English and mathematics with good understanding. The focus at Key Stage 3 is to increase the rate of re-integration into mainstream provision. Over the last year, attendance, and progress in English and mathematics, were weaker at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4.

There is an improving picture in Key Stage 4, which makes up the majority of pupils. Pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics from the time they enter the centre. More gained entry-level qualifications in English and mathematics because they attended courses and completed exams. Overall, more pupils entered for qualifications in 2015 than in previous years. The Key Stage 4 leader reports that better planning and focusing of teaching enabled more pupils to gain GCSE grades. A few gained C grades but not as many as the centre targeted.

Many pupils at alternative provision are making gains in their personal development and preparing well for the next stage of training or employment. However, this is variable. For example, in an English lesson, a class of Slovak pupils were asked to copy from the board and insert commas. Pupils could not sound out the words or

understand the meaning of the text. As a result, they made no progress. Reading books were appropriately matched for some but were too easy for others.

A new teacher assessment system is beginning to monitor the progress of pupils, in smaller steps. Early evidence indicates positive progress in English and mathematics. However, staff have not checked their assessments with subject teachers in mainstream schools so leaders cannot be confident that these measures are reliable. Alternative providers lack awareness of these new systems and do not always receive precise enough information about the particular learning needs of pupils in English and mathematics. A new marking system has recently been introduced across all sites. Leaders have not yet evaluated its impact.

Professional development and greater teamwork have increased through dedicated time for whole staff training. Improved systems of accountability are at an early stage of implementation. Formal meetings to discuss pupils' progress have just started. Procedures for analysing progress by examining pupils' work are undeveloped. The monitoring of alternative provision for Slovak pupils learning English as an additional language is not sufficiently robust.

The management committee's priority is to develop the capacity of leadership at senior and middle levels. It is monitoring targets for the executive headteacher and the senior team to ensure that performance management becomes more effective. It is seeking a clearer analysis of the impact of teaching and alternative provision on pupils' academic progress and personal development.

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

External support

The local authority and the executive headteacher are playing an influential role in developing strategies for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion and in strengthening partnership agreements with primary and secondary schools. The local authority has funded leaders from secondary schools to support the centre. They have helped to improve management systems and revise procedures for enabling pupils to return to a mainstream school. The local authority steering group continues to regularly monitor progress on the key issues since the centre's exit from special measures. The local authority should consider the reasons for the exceptionally high permanent exclusion of Slovak pupils and take more action to reduce it. It should also consider whether induction, and the teaching of English to recently arrived secondary pupils from Slovakia, is sufficiently well planned and effective.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee and the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector