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Mr Jeff Lough
Linhope PRU
Linhope Centre
Linhope Rd
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Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mr Lough

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Linhope PRU

Following my visit with Gina White, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Christopher Campbell, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 14 September 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, six members of the management committee and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also met with senior leaders responsible for key aspects of the pupil referral unit (PRU) and a group of teachers. Inspectors visited lessons at the main PRU site at Linhope and the smaller satellite site at Pottery Bank. An inspector visited Newcastle College and had a telephone conversation with the headteacher at Talbot House School. Both settings provide alternative provision for a very small number of pupils.

Inspectors considered a wide range of documents and records relating to attendance and pupils' behaviour. Management committee records and documents relating to the local authority's review of city-wide provision for pupils with a high level of need were also considered.

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

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Context

Since the last inspection in February 2016, the number of pupils on roll has fallen dramatically from 297 to 133. The age range of pupils admitted to the PRU has changed and at the time of this inspection almost all pupils were in Years 9, 10 and 11. There are no key stage 1 or key stage 2 pupils. The majority of pupils are disadvantaged and have an identified special educational need and/or disability. The vast majority of pupils are boys from White British backgrounds. A significant number of pupils are looked after by the local authority.

The local authority took immediate action following the last inspection so that referrals and admissions to the PRU reduced to a minimum. All key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils now have appropriate places in other schools. As a result, the number of teachers and senior leaders employed at the PRU has reduced significantly. The headteacher and management committee have created a new leadership structure to increase leadership capacity.

The PRU now operates on two sites: Linhope and Pottery Bank. A very small number of pupils use alternative provision at Talbot House School, Trinity Solutions, Newcastle College and TLG (The Learning Group).

Personal develop, behaviour and welfare

Since the last inspection you have worked with senior leaders and the local authority to ensure that pupils' attendance is registered, in line with legal requirements. The accurate attendance rate of 56.9% for the spring term of 2016 showed a significant decline from the previously inaccurate published figures. Although attendance rose to 65% by the end of the summer term, you recognise that this is still far too low. Attendance is monitored very closely at both sites and at alternative provisions, and a robust approach is taken when any pupil is absent or absconds during the day. Using accurate information, leaders are working to develop a wider range of actions to help pupils increase their attendance.

Individual pupils' attendance varies considerably. Some pupils are motivated by the attendance reward system. They appreciate the lesson-by-lesson registration, as they earn points for remaining in lessons and turning up on time. This leads to some pupils making good gains in attendance and punctuality.

Leaders are beginning to use attendance information to identify patterns of poor and irregular attendance for different groups of pupils. This work is at an early stage of development. Current information shows that pupils who are looked after

by the local authority and are living in children's homes have very poor attendance. You recognise that more needs to be done by your team and the agencies responsible for this particularly vulnerable group of young people to make sure that they get the full benefit of regular attendance.

The proportion of pupils on partial timetables has reduced significantly. Currently, only a small minority of pupils have provision for less than 25 hours per week. Pupils who previously only attended lessons in local libraries or community centres for 10 hours a week now attend the Linhope site, where they benefit from learning alongside other pupils and staff. The provision for all pupils with less than 25 hours a week is reviewed every four weeks and is gradually increasing. This is a significant improvement from February 2016, but you recognise that more still needs to be done to ensure that all pupils receive full-time education.

Pupils' behaviour is generally calm and well managed. Staff quickly develop positive relationships with pupils, which builds their trust and confidence. This enables staff to tackle some very difficult issues with pupils. Pupils are confident that they can share worries and concerns with staff and, most importantly, they are confident that staff will give them the help they need.

Systems to record pupils' behaviour have improved. You have an appropriate understanding of what constitutes a serious incident and how it should be recorded. However, leaders do not use this information systematically to work out the underlying causes of the pupils' behaviour. As a result, plans to help pupils learn to manage their own behaviour are not always as effective as they could be.

In the second half of the summer term when all pupils were first accommodated at the main site or at Pottery Bank, there was a rise in the rate of fixed-term exclusions. The current rate of fixed-term exclusions indicates there are early signs that pupils are accepting the new expectations.

Pupils' attitudes to learning vary. Some respond very positively to lessons that move them on at the right pace to their next step in learning. In short visits to lessons, inspectors saw pupils asking for help and responding well when teachers corrected their work. In some lessons, teachers planned short tasks which helped to sustain pupils' concentration and attention.

Work with other agencies to support pupils and their families remains a positive feature of the PRU's work. Staff are trained in a wide range of child protection and safeguarding issues, including child sexual exploitation and substance misuse. They use their knowledge confidently to identify pupils who are at risk. Referrals to other agencies are swift and always followed up. A recently introduced recording system gives staff a clearer view of the concerns about a pupil as they emerge. However, as with other newly introduced systems, leaders are not getting the best out of this information. Previous safeguarding information has not been merged onto the new system. You and the management committee recognise that you need to take

urgent action to ensure all individual pupils' safeguarding records are kept together so that they can be accessed quickly and to avoid the loss of any important information.

There is a good range of activities planned to encourage the pupils to learn to keep themselves safe and to make healthy and safe lifestyle choices. However, many pupils smoke and you agreed that more could be done to help pupils to stop smoking.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and the local authority responded with appropriate and timely action to the serious concerns identified at the last inspection. Crucially, the local authority stopped placing pupils at the PRU, so when the Year 11 pupils left, the vast majority of pupils could be accommodated at Linhope or Pottery Bank. Many new systems have been established to record attendance and behaviour and to quality assure the work of the PRU and alternative provisions. The local authority has completed a review of alternative provision and now has a clear strategy to support pupils at risk of exclusion and those who have been excluded from school. The fair access panel is chaired by the new assistant director for children and young people. This demonstrates the council's high level of commitment to getting the provision right and sustaining a more inclusive and equitable approach into the future.

It is too early to say if the new systems at the PRU and the council's new approach will be fully effective. However, there are indications that under the council's leadership, mainstream schools are accepting responsibility for a wider range of vulnerable pupils.

Since the last inspection, a new management committee has been appointed. Members have a good range of appropriate skills, many being headteachers or principals from primary and secondary schools. They articulated their determination to steer the necessary improvements in all aspects of the PRU and to ensure that the council delivers its new strategy. This determination has yet to be tested.

The new committee is requiring you and other leaders to give them detailed reports about all aspects of the PRU's work, and sub-committees are beginning to challenge the accuracy of the information that you and the leadership team collect and how effectively it is used. As with all other recently introduced procedures, more time is needed for the work of the management committee to embed and be fully effective.

External support

New leaders in the local authority have had a vitally important role in supporting you and the PRU staff to ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

You have secured support from a range of external consultants and local authority officers to review and develop attendance, behaviour management, risk assessments and quality assurance processes. This work has been effective and all concerned have a clear view of what more needs to be done.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and managers should:

- urgently ensure that all pupils' safeguarding information is stored in one system so that staff can clearly track concerns about all individual pupils and groups of pupils
- analyse the information they collect about attendance, behaviour and learning and use the analysis to inform plans and interventions for individual pupils, and to understand the impact of their work on different groups of pupils
- take more effective steps to support pupils to stop smoking.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Hayter
Her Majesty's Inspector