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Mr Matthew McCluskey  
Unity Learning Centre  
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Nottingham  
Nottinghamshire  
NG7 4ES

Dear Mr McCluskey

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Unity Learning Centre**

Following my visit to your school on 2 February 2017, 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 May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the responsible authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- check the progress of pupils, who are not on track to reach their targets, more frequently to ensure that any barriers to learning are removed promptly
- communicate quickly and directly to pupils and their families if there is an issue over attendance and to emphasise the importance of good attendance

- ensure that the school's website meets requirements on the publication of specified information.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, the chair of the interim executive board, the attendance officer, the achievement manager, the coordinator for special educational needs and disabilities and other members of staff, students and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held telephone conversations with four parents and with two alternative providers. I scrutinised the school improvement plan and the school's self-evaluation. I observed teaching and learning in the classroom and studied pupils' work. I also scrutinised information regarding safeguarding, achievement and exclusions.

## **Context**

There have been considerable staff changes following the previous section 5 inspection. The staffing has been restructured. As a result, the school no longer employs achievement mentors and the role of achievement managers has changed. One achievement manager has resigned and another achievement manager is currently absent. Ten achievement mentors have left the school. A higher-level teaching assistant left in October 2016 and has been replaced by another higher-level teaching assistant. An intervention officer for key stage 4 took up their post in September 2016. A new teaching assistant started in January 2016. At the time of the inspection, the deputy headteacher was absent. The school is currently recruiting for another attendance officer and another achievement manager. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils on roll at the school. It has risen from 119 last year to 143 at present. The school works with 17 alternative providers. The vast majority of pupils attend alternative providers. The school is planning to join the Raleigh Learning Trust on 1 March 2017.

## **Main findings**

You and the executive headteacher have shown determined and effective leadership to move the school forward. You have restructured the school's workforce to improve the outcomes for your pupils. The achievement manager has communicated effectively with alternative providers to ensure that they provide regular, detailed reports about the progress of the pupils. In addition, each half term, a member of the leadership team visits each provider to discuss the progress of the pupils. Consequently, you are now much better informed about the progress the pupils are making.

Your pupils' progress information shows that two thirds of the pupils are now meeting their academic targets. Moreover, one third of pupils are exceeding their

targets. However, one third of pupils are not on track to meet their targets. You have not checked the impact of intervention provision for these pupils closely enough to ensure that they are making accelerated progress to stay on track.

You and your team have worked very hard to ensure that the curriculum better meets the needs of the pupils. You have increased the range of vocational and academic courses available. Consequently, last term there was a 25% decrease in the number of pupils changing courses.

The alternative providers are particularly impressed with your work in this area. Because pupils are now receiving a curriculum more suited to their needs, the providers have noticed that the pupils' behaviour has improved. There has been a decrease in the proportion of exclusions compared to the same time a year ago. In addition, the achievement manager has responded quickly to any safeguarding or behavioural concerns at the alternative provisions to ensure that pupils are safe, and any barriers to learning are removed quickly.

The parents I spoke to were very pleased with the school. They find the staff approachable and supportive. They say issues are dealt with quickly and they receive reports about how well their child is progressing. One parent said, 'My son is thriving because the course interests him.'

You have successfully raised the staff's expectations of how highly pupils can achieve. In addition, you have challenged the most able pupils to take GCSE courses to encourage more of them to reach their full potential. You have used the pupils' key stage 2 and 3 assessments to inform your judgements about the most appropriate courses for pupils to take. As a result, more pupils are taking GCSE courses in a range of subjects compared to last year.

The special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator has had much more contact with alternative providers. This has enabled him to visit the providers to offer support to enable the pupils to learn better. One alternative provider spoke very positively about this support and they feel the pupils have benefited well. However, the progress of this group of pupils is not currently checked closely enough to ensure that the extra provision is working and that pupils are on track to meet their targets.

You have promoted reading well to those pupils who access learning at the Unity site. More books have been bought which match the interests and the reading ages of the pupils. Consequently, pupils are enjoying reading much more. You recognise you have not yet promoted reading with the pupils at alternative providers, but have plans to do so in the near future.

The attendance of pupils improved last term, particularly in Year 11. The attendance officer has worked successfully with the education welfare officer to improve attendance. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is now higher than

that of the other pupils.

Nonetheless, there are still too many pupils who have low attendance. When members of staff have spoken to individual pupils and their families about concerns over attendance, the impact has been positive and the pupil's attendance improves. However, the school has not responded quickly enough in speaking to every pupil whose attendance has dropped.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is being promoted within the school. The pupils are well informed about the potential dangers of the internet and of how to eat healthily. The pupils have responded maturely to the recent lessons on sex and relationships. The atmosphere within the Unity Learning Centre is calm and purposeful. Pupils told me that disruptions to learning are infrequent and the staff deal with behavioural issues well.

The chair of the interim executive board is highly knowledgeable about the school's work. He has challenged the leaders to ensure that the staff structure better meets the needs of the pupils. He has visited alternative providers to find out about the quality of education provided. He is well aware of the progress the school has made and equally aware of the improvements still required.

Leaders have not ensured that the school's website contains all the up-to-date information as required by the government, concerning the pupil premium spending, information about governance, achievement and the curriculum.

### **External support**

The local authority adviser knows the school well. She has challenged the staff to raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve. She has checked the staff's knowledge of the progress that the pupils are making. The systems for monitoring pupils' progress are now much more effective.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**