

26 March 2018

Mrs Janet Bourne  
Headteacher  
Rivers Education Support Centre  
Old Essex Road  
Hoddesdon  
Hertfordshire  
EN11 0AA

Dear Mrs Bourne

### **Short inspection of Rivers Education Support Centre**

Following my visit to the pupil referral unit, known as the education support centre, on 13 March 2018 with Fyfe Johnston, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the centre was judged to be good in February 2014.

### **This education support centre continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the centre since the previous inspection. Skilful management of behaviour helps pupils to get back on track with their education. Pupils want to learn and enjoy the learning. The pupils, parents and carers who expressed views during the inspection are full of praise for the work of the staff.

Staff are highly committed to the pupils. There is an unfaltering pursuit of the tiny things that make the difference between the pupils being successful or not. Relationships between pupils and staff, and between pupils are positive, relaxed and respectful. Pupils become confident in their abilities and relationships.

Visitors cannot fail to be impressed by the way that learning takes place in a calm, orderly and purposeful way. The environment is vibrant and well maintained, and pupils take good care of it. This is a place where pupils can focus on their learning.

Learning is fun and memorable. The work in folders and books are a good record of what pupils have learned and can do. Courses are at the right level to challenge pupils to reach their potential and staff provide pupils with the support that they need to do their best. Learning is often personalised so that pupils can make up for lost learning, and make rapid gains in what they know and can do.

The amount of learning time available each day limits what pupils can achieve. For most pupils, the day ends at 1.30pm. For some pupils, particularly for those who attend only in the afternoons, part-time placements have gone on for too long.

The leadership team is the same as it was at the time of the previous inspection and the work of the team has gone from strength to strength. The team pursues improvements continually and looks at the effectiveness of the work in great detail. The improvements are especially evident in the content of the curriculum and the quality of assessment. The work to improve assessment, as identified at the previous inspection, has gone well. It has established firm foundations for further development so that better use is made of what is known about pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The arrangements to safeguard pupils are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding pupils at the centre and beyond. There is mutual respect between staff and pupils, which helps to promote safety and well-being successfully. Staff have a deep understanding of pupils' needs and pupils trust the staff to know and do what is right and fair. Staff pre-empt tricky situations, such as pupils struggling with having the confidence to take examinations, or travelling independently to the centre and work experience.

Staff are fastidious about checking the whereabouts and well-being of pupils who are absent or late. Partnerships with parents to get their children to attend each day works well to make pupils responsible for attending the centre more frequently. There is, however, more to do to improve pupils' attendance sufficiently.

Record-keeping is thorough. The records of employment checks for staff show the appropriate range of checks. The records of referrals to support services relating to pupils' well-being show appropriate and timely action, as well as conscientiously prompting others into action.

### **Inspection findings**

- We looked at four things in particular to check that the centre's work continues to be good: pupils' attendance, curriculum time, curriculum content and the use of assessment.
- High priority is given to ensuring that pupils attend well because staff recognise that academic achievements and personal safety depend on pupils being in the centre each day. For many pupils, absence reduces significantly, particularly for those with previously low rates of attendance. Too few pupils, however, reach the level of attendance needed to do well in their learning over time.
- The current requirement for pupils to attend the centre from 8.30am to 1.30pm or from 1.30pm to 3.45pm limits learning time and social time. There is additional time for some pupils to extend their learning meaningfully. For example, pupils can attend a day a week for work experience or an extra session for personal tuition once a week, but this is not available for all.

- Some pupils, including those with risk assessment management plans, have been on part-time programmes since the autumn term 2017, which is too long. Not only does this mean that they are not getting their entitlement to full-time education, but because the part-time pupils attend in the afternoons, other pupils have reduced opportunities to attend beyond 1.30pm each day.
- The local authority are not sufficiently aware of the arrangements for the pupils on part-time placements.
- The management committee are not challenging the leadership team or the local authority sufficiently to make sure that all pupils have an appropriate, full-time education.
- Notwithstanding the reduced time available for pupils to gain knowledge, skills and understanding first-hand, the curriculum has many strengths. It is evaluated continuously to make sure that the courses prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education, whether to go to college or to reintegrate in mainstream schools. When changes need to be made, perhaps because the course does not motivate pupils enough or if extra courses are needed to prepare for a higher-level qualification at college, the changes are well thought through and made swiftly.
- The curriculum for key stage 3 pupils is appropriately based on the expectation that reintegration to mainstream schools will happen as soon as possible. The emphasis on developing the necessary personal skills and attitudes to learning goes hand-in-hand with filling the gaps in learning. This dual approach works well to get pupils successfully back on track and to return to mainstream schools.
- At key stage 4, pupils study towards level 2 qualifications, including English and mathematics, so that they have what they need for post-16 courses that suit their needs and aspirations.
- The assessment of pupils' achievement has come on in leaps and bounds since the previous inspection. The improvements needed were to establish accurate assessments on entry, to set challenging long-term targets, and for all adults to support pupils' improvement through short-term targets.
- Checking work, tracking individual targets by staff and pupils, and discussions between staff, pupils and parents show successfully how well pupils are doing in relation to the targets set. Less developed is the evaluation of what the monitoring shows about the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' learning, particularly for any subjects or skills beyond those for English and mathematics.

### **Next steps for the centre**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- alternatives are explored with partners, as appropriate and including the local authority, so that
  - all pupils access full-time education
  - on-site learning extends sufficiently each day for all pupils

- pupils' attendance matches the national average for secondary-aged pupils
- pupils' progress is evaluated rigorously across all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors visited both sites; key stage 3 pupils at Hertford and key stage 4 pupils at Hoddesdon. Pupils' learning was observed jointly with either the headteacher or one of the two deputy headteachers. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their work and looked at work in books, folders and on display.

Meetings were held with pupils, senior leaders and three members of the management committee. A telephone discussion was held with a representative from the local authority. We took account of the questionnaire responses from four pupils, 11 parents (including eight free-text responses) and 42 staff.

The documents scrutinised included the single central record of employment checks for staff, the school's self-evaluation and action plan, curriculum plans and the tracking of pupils' achievements.