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Mr Nick Stanton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Stanton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stroud and Cotswold Alternative Provision School

Following my visit to your school on 20 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils attend more regularly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the chair and vice chair of the management committee, and an educational psychologist. A phone call was held with three representatives from the local authority and an independent safeguarding consultant. All these activities were undertaken to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. I also checked the effectiveness of safeguarding

arrangements. I visited lessons with you. During these times, I viewed pupils' work and looked at their progress, and talked to them about it. I also listened to pupils read and spoke with pupils and staff informally during lunchtime and other times of the day to gather their views.

Context

You took up your post in 2015 as operational headteacher for the Stroud and Cotswold Alternative Provision School, with responsibility for the two centres, Rylelease and Belle View. These centres share the same site. Following the resignation of the executive headteacher in July 2016, who was not replaced, you took on the wider responsibilities and currently lead the provision.

Together, the two centres provide places for primary and secondary pupils who have been permanently excluded, places for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion, and short-term places for pupils who need support in improving their behaviour. Pupils attend the provision from a wide catchment area, covering Gloucestershire. The majority of pupils attend by taxi.

The school works closely with a range of other providers and organisations to ensure that pupils, especially those in Years 10 and 11, have experiences that carefully meet their needs and prepare them well for their next stages in education, training or employment.

Since the previous inspection, two primary staff were employed on a temporary basis in October 2017. A new local management committee was put in place in January 2018. The local management committee has a strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It holds leaders to account for the quality of provision and the progress pupils make through monitoring carefully the impact of actions being taken.

At the time of the visit, a review of alternative provision in Gloucestershire was taking place. This review is due to end in July 2018, and the findings will be published in September 2018. The recommended changes are to be fully implemented by September 2019.

Main findings

You are successfully driving forward the improvements identified at the time of the previous inspection. This is because you work in an open and collegiate way with your leaders and other staff. You are ably supported by your leaders. Together, you work effectively with staff to develop practice in order to further improve the quality of education and care that pupils receive. Staff share your vision to provide pupils with the best experiences in order for them to become successful learners. Consequently, the number of pupils who are successful when returning to their mainstream school continues to grow.

Safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory requirements and are effective. The nature of the provision means that all of the pupils are vulnerable. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect each pupil from all potential risks. Staff receive high-quality training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe. Consequently, they are able to spot concerns quickly and take decisive action with confidence. Staff welcome the daily morning and evening briefings as an opportunity to discuss the welfare of pupils and to share concerns as they arise. These briefings help to minimise risk to pupils' well-being.

Relationships between pupils and staff are impressive. Pupils who spoke to me are confident that staff do all they can to keep them safe. They welcome the strong relationships they have with staff, which allow them to share their worries and anxieties.

You ensure that records are detailed. They are carefully checked by members of the local management committee to ensure that they are robust and fit for purpose. You make effective use of an independent safeguarding consultant to make sure that issues related to safety and the safeguarding of pupils are appropriately and systematically checked and evaluated.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve, especially for the younger pupils and the most able. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. For example, during the visit, younger pupils were eager to share their writing linked to the topic, 'Around the world in eighty days'. The writing clearly showed the pupils using their imaginations to hold the readers' attention, as in, 'I am in a chariot with butterflies in my tummy.'

Teachers carefully plan learning activities which are more successfully meeting the individual needs of pupils. Pupils are engaged in their learning because they are interested in the work. This was exemplified when viewing the artwork of pupils in key stages 3 and 4. Portfolios and displays demonstrated pupils' impressive skills, such as the use of cosmetics and wider materials to create special effects, such as medical injuries.

The subject knowledge of teachers is strong. This means that pupils receive high-quality teaching and learning activities which are bespoke to their needs and which excite and motivate them. In addition, pupils are provided with incisive feedback which helps them to know and understand what they need to do in order to improve.

The precise questioning by staff probes pupils' understanding and makes them think more deeply, especially for the most able pupils. As a result, pupils, including the most able, are making stronger progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.

You have significantly raised the profile of reading. There is an expectation that every pupil will read daily in the provision. Coupled with the introduction of the accelerated reader programme, current progress information shows that pupils across the provision are quickly catching up with their peers in their reading. This gives pupils the skills required to successfully access the wider curriculum. While not all pupils enjoy reading, they told the inspector that they understand the importance of being able to read well.

While attendance continues to improve, you are aware that more work is required to ensure that pupils attend regularly. Therefore, you continue to work closely with the local authority and parents to tackle this; but attendance remains below the national average.

External support

The provision is supported well by the local authority, which continues to monitor and provide support where needed. However, as a result of the strong progress the provision is making, this support is now light touch. Indeed, I was told that the local authority uses the provision to share good practice with other alternative provisions in the county. Furthermore, headteachers in partner schools, those buying in to the provision and other schools that use the service, hold the school in high regard. This is because you and your staff are committed to supporting pupils effectively and to providing bespoke packages to meet their needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall

Her Majesty's Inspector