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2 October 2018

Miss Katherine Walton
Headteacher
Alternative Education Service - The Beacon Centre
Temple Park Road
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Dear Miss Walton

Short inspection of Alternative Education Service - The Beacon Centre

Following my visit to the school on 11 September 2018 with Michael Wardle, Her Majesty's 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 school was judged to be good in September 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Despite only being in post for nine days you have quickly identified the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Your focus on improving the primary section of the school demonstrates this well. Your actions have already started to bring about improvement. For example, the strategy of introducing a healthy breakfast for the pupils, followed by a well-organised physical education (PE) session, has proved popular with parents and carers, pupils and staff. Although it is too soon to formally evaluate the effect on pupils' behaviour, anecdotal evidence suggests that incidents of difficult behaviour have reduced.

You and the deputy headteacher have a clear vision for the future of the school. The outline development plan you have very recently put in place reflects the vision well. You have rightly identified the need for improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and outcomes in the primary provision. You have already successfully started to tackle this issue through training and mentoring of current staff. However, you also recognise that the staff team needs to be permanent and knowledgeable so that it can improve the quality of outcomes for pupils.

The newly appointed deputy headteacher uses his knowledge of the setting well to oversee the secondary provision. As leaders, you are justifiably proud of the better-

than-expected results achieved by last year's Year 11 leavers. The effective use of the school makes of vocational opportunities, alongside an academic programme, has ensured that 100% of pupils who left in 2016–17 went on to further study or apprenticeships.

Most of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection have now been met. However, improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics, you accept, still needs further work.

As leaders, both you and the deputy headteacher have identified the need to improve the primary curriculum further. You have started this journey by introducing art into the curriculum this year. Further plans for making the school's curriculum more closely aligned to that taught in maintained schools are in place. This, you recognise, is likely to enhance the chances of pupils making a successful return to main stream school.

Parents spoke positively, to the inspection team, of the work carried out by school staff and members for the leadership team in supporting their children. Comments such as, 'The staff are brilliant, they understand my child and have helped him to manage his feelings and behaviour,' typified parents' feelings. Pupils spoken to also said how much the school had helped them to control their behaviour and realise their ambition to return to school. Reflections such as, 'I now know how to ignore others who might try to upset me and get my head down to work,' demonstrated pupils' understanding of how to manage their emotions in school.

The governing body has a clear understanding of the needs of the school. Governors have a wide range of skills. This enables them to offer knowledgeable and well-targeted support for you and the leadership team. Individual governors offer strong levels of support to you, the leadership of governance however has not yet developed their offer of support as you might expect.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have ensured that staff have already received the latest required safeguarding training. Those spoken to were clear about their roles and responsibilities, and the pathway to follow should an issue arise. You clearly recognise the vulnerability of some of the learners in your care. The work undertaken by the safeguarding lead, for example, through attending and sometimes leading multi-disciplinary team meetings, ensures that pupils are safe and well cared for in school.

Staff recognise that everyone is responsible for keeping pupils safe. This has led to a clear culture of care and vigilance in school. This was clearly reflected in staff comments such as, 'We record everything of concern so that we can make sure that nothing important is missed.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, I focused on the quality of teaching and learning within the school. In our initial discussion, you explained that you had quickly established that the quality of teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils were stronger in the secondary provision than in the primary provision. Your school development plan, although only in outline format, demonstrated clearly the steps you are taking towards making the improvements needed in the primary provision. These include the appointment of two permanent primary trained teachers.
- You have already begun to address the issues identified on your development plan. However, the quality of teaching and learning and work in pupils' books seen during the inspection show that there is still much to do to improve outcomes for pupils overall. For example, currently, planned work does not meet the needs of individual pupils as accurately as it could, particularly in the primary provision.
- A further question I posed at the start of the inspection was whether school leaders had met the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report? In particular, the inspection team was keen to identify whether the quality of mathematics teaching has improved across the school. The accreditations gained by Year 11 pupils last year were better than expected, including in mathematics. However, pupils' progress overall remains slower in the primary sector. The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics has improved, but, as you clearly recognise, more still needs to be done to bring about improvement to pupils' outcomes, particularly in primary.
- The third of my key lines of enquiry for the inspection was the curriculum, particularly whether the curriculum in the school was sufficiently broad to enable pupils to make a successful return to mainstream school. Your development plan demonstrated your desire to bring about improvement in the primary curriculum. You have already increased the number of subjects that pupils study by introducing art and more PE. You plan that other subjects will follow.
- During the inspection, it became apparent that attendance was not as high as it should be. Current attendance across the school is 80%. A wide range of strategies have already been put in place to improve attendance. However, at the time of the inspection it was too soon to measure the effect of these measures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the planned improvements in the primary sector of school, which include the appointment of two permanent members of teaching staff, are carried out without delay
- outcomes for pupils are improved within the primary sector by making sure that work set for pupils more accurately meets their needs
- the primary curriculum is developed to include a wider range of subjects to help pupils' return to mainstream settings
- pupils' attendance is improved by continued support and monitoring for families.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team looked at learning in both the primary and secondary parts of the school. Learning was also observed at two of the three alternative providers used by the school. Discussions were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, two members of the governing body, pupils, parents and staff. The inspection team also scrutinised a range of documents, including safeguarding, behaviour and curriculum documents. Senior leaders accompanied the inspection team on brief visits to lessons on both of the school sites. A scrutiny of pupils' workbooks was also carried out across the school.