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21 November 2019

Mr Ron Hall
Executive Head of Service
The Pupil Referral Service, Peterborough
Williamson Avenue
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Dear Mr Hall

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Pupil Referral Service, Peterborough

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 2019, with Tim Bristow, Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2019.

- Urgently address the serious concerns in the school's safeguarding arrangements by:
 - reducing the number of pupils on part-time timetables
 - ensuring that programmes are reviewed appropriately to reduce the amount of time pupils spend in part-time provision
 - implementing effective strategies to reduce the number of pupils placed on fixed-period exclusion
 - ensuring that all pupils attend school as regularly as they should
 - reviewing the effectiveness of the 'calm' rooms in the primary phase, and making sure that all staff are trained appropriately in the use of restraint.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - reviewing leadership capacity in the context of the range of services currently offered
 - sharpening improvement planning and making best use of all the available information to develop strategies to secure rapid improvements
 - ensuring that there is consistency in the staff's application of leaders' expectations and pupils' experiences across centres
 - checking that staff in the different centres have consistent access to the information they need to make any changes required
 - implementing assessment systems more effectively so that pupils' progress is monitored appropriately across subjects and used to set high expectations
 - ensuring that the information presented to the governing body is accurate and sufficiently detailed for governors to hold leaders to account effectively for the service's performance.
- Secure good teaching, learning and assessment to improve outcomes for all pupils by:
 - making sure that all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information well to match learning activities more closely to pupils' needs and abilities
 - creating better opportunities for the most able pupils to complete more complex tasks to enable them to attain higher standards
 - ensuring that staff know, and consider appropriately, the specific needs of pupils with SEND when planning for their learning.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 November 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive head of service, members of the leadership team, groups of pupils, a group of parents, a small group of staff, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. The focus of the visit was on the actions taken to address the concerns about the school's safeguarding arrangements identified at the previous inspection and the actions taken to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Context

There have been changes to the leadership arrangements in all three centres that make up the Pupil Referral Service, Peterborough. Since the previous inspection, the executive headteacher and a deputy headteacher have left. There are three other leaders who are currently absent from school. The executive head of service took up his post three weeks before this inspection. A new deputy headteacher is in post and a senior leader from a local secondary school has been seconded to the leadership team. Some leaders have changed roles. The governing body, which was the responsible authority at the time of the previous inspection, has been replaced very recently by a management committee established by the local authority. The local authority has withdrawn the outreach services that the provision used to provide to other schools.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Leaders have acted decisively to significantly reduce the number of pupils who follow part-time programmes. They have ensured that, where appropriate, pupils are now having full-time education. Checks, including home visits, are made to ensure the safety and well-being of the pupils who follow part-time programmes.

A common system is now in place across all three centres to regularly review the use of part-time timetables with pupils and their parents. This is having success in increasing the time spent at the provision for the majority of pupils.

There are indications that the actions taken by leaders to reduce the number of fixed-period exclusions are having an impact. This term there has been a reduction by a quarter in the number of fixed-period exclusions compared to a similar period of time last academic year.

The attendance rate across the school is rising. In part, this is due to the reduction in part-time timetables and fixed-period exclusions. Systems to monitor attendance have been tightened. Although there is evidence of improved attendance overall,

and for individuals, attendance remains low and persistent absence remains too high.

Calming areas and the environment in the primary unit have been altered, so that pupils' liberty is not restricted. The culture in this part of the school is changing. Pupils now choose to take themselves to these areas to de-escalate situations caused by their anger. This makes a positive contribution to the personal development and attitudes of the individuals concerned. In the past, the use of these facilities was punitive.

Leaders have improved the procedures for the use of physical restraint considerably. The recording of incidents is now consistent across the three centres, so leaders can get an accurate view of the reasons for physical restraint and how frequently it is used. Incidents where pupils' behaviour requires physical intervention are handled proportionately and appropriately.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Leaders have a clear vision of what they want to achieve for the school and the pupils it serves. Leaders are endeavouring to provide a curriculum that meets pupils' needs and interests. They have reviewed the curriculum across the three centres and the different programmes provided. Introduction of new courses and a review of how leaders use alternative provision are examples of the work done to review the curriculum. These are contributing to better attendance and the reduction in part-time programmes.

At the time of the last inspection, few pupils returned to mainstream education because there were no plans for them to do so. This has changed. Leaders demonstrate a determination to ensure that, where possible, pupils can be returned swiftly to other schools when they are ready to do so. For example, currently three pupils are in the process of being found places in primary and secondary schools because of the success of teachers and leaders who have prepared them to be able to make this move.

The school's action plan accurately identifies priorities for improvement and gives clear measures of how and when these will be achieved. It is underpinned by appropriate actions. More rigorous processes for planning, monitoring and evaluating the school's work are in place than previously.

Leaders recognise the impact on staff morale caused by changes in leadership, difficulties in recruiting staff and uncertainty about the move to an academy sponsor. However, staff spoken to recognise the need for change and feel that changes are for the better and 'moving in the right direction'.

The new management committee consists of members who the local authority believes have the expertise, experience and knowledge required to support the

school to move forward and provide appropriate levels of challenge to senior leaders.

Leaders have acted to ensure that there is greater consistency and joint working across the three centres. Systems are now in place to ensure that leaders have the information they need to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision. For example, leaders across the school meet on a weekly basis to monitor attendance, behaviour, use of restraint, part-time timetables, pupils' welfare and to share ideas.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have adopted a common approach to administering fixed-term exclusions when they occur. They are committed to reducing the number of them across the three centres. A system of internal exclusion is in place. This is being used appropriately. It ensures that pupils continue with their learning and are kept safe from risks that they would be exposed to if excluded from the school.
- Consistent approaches to behaviour and rewards are ensuring the same expectations of staff and pupils across the school. These are helping to reduce instances of fixed-term exclusions and are contributing to improved attendance.
- Improved systems are in place for monitoring attendance and the safety and welfare of pupils who do not attend the provision full-time. Leaders are following guidance from the local authority on how to record attendance accurately.
- Actions taken to reduce the number of part-time programmes and the number of fixed-term exclusions are contributing to improved attendance.
- The secondment of a local authority adviser to lead on safeguarding has ensured that safeguarding is effective, despite significant changes in staffing and leadership.
- Leaders have used external reviews of attendance, safeguarding and restraint to inform planning and support their evaluation of the difference that actions are making.
- Returning pupils to mainstream education when it is appropriate has become a main priority again.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The reduction of part-time timetables in the primary unit initially caused an increase in fixed-term exclusions and use of physical restraint. These are now reducing as pupils respond to the provision and staff expectations.
- The use of part-time timetables for some pupils is still resulting in low attendance.
- Although planned, whole-staff training for behaviour management, restraint and safeguarding has not taken place.

- The format of the records of physical restraint do not aid analysis of incidents.
- Analysis of information about behaviour and attendance is not being used to identify how these aspects could be further improved.
- Although staff spoken to were positive, some staff are resisting changes that are necessary to improve the provision.

External support

The local authority has acted quickly to address weaknesses in leadership and management. In addition to establishing a management committee, the local authority has arranged for senior leaders to be seconded to the school. This has strengthened the leadership team and provided leadership for safeguarding across the school. Reviews of safeguarding, attendance, restraint and teaching and learning have informed leaders' actions. This high-quality support has contributed to the improvements that have been made since the previous inspection.