



27 June 2006

Mrs C Newman
Project 16
White Lion Centre
White Lion Street
Islington
London
N1 9PW

Dear Mrs Newman

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF PROJECT 16 PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

Introduction

Following my visit to the unit on 20 and 21 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the unit became subject to special measures in January 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

HMI observed the unit's work, scrutinised documents and met or spoke with the acting head of unit and her acting deputy, representatives of CEA@Islington, unit staff, the Connexions service, the chair of the management board and students.

Context

Since the unit became subject to special measures, the substantive head of centre has left her post and has been temporarily replaced by the deputy head of CEA@Islington's behaviour support service. The LA is now undertaking a consultation about closing the borough's four separate pupil referral units and re-organising them into one or two units.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain far below national averages. Despite some pleasing aspects, the students' achievement, related to their starting points and needs, is inadequate. Most students underachieved elsewhere when in Key Stage 3 and have continued to do so in the strongly academic curriculum the unit provides at Key Stage 4. In the 2006 Year 11 cohort, most students took at least one GCSE, nearly half took two and 13% took four or more. Whilst these examinations are suitable for many, the unit is rightly also starting to use other accredited tests in numeracy and literacy, including some which are taken online. These enable more students to show their achievements and help identify what they need to learn next. Some good art work by students is displayed in the unit and in a local café. The unit has evidence to show that those students whose attendance is best usually make the fastest progress. However, there are not nearly enough opportunities for students to show their attainment in work-based learning or personal development.

Personal development and well-being

The rate of attendance remains extremely low. Although this can vary considerably, on an average day only about half the students attend and most of these arrive late, often by an hour or more. Students tend to drift in at times to suit themselves. Many students do not see much point in being in education, although they feel the centre is a caring place. In a survey, helpfully carried out by the unit, about half the students had high self-regard as learners. The unit has identified that the better students feel about themselves, the more they attend. The unit's statistics also show that students attend more regularly and punctually when doing activities they see as relevant, such as work experience.

Since the last inspection, behaviour has continued to improve as a result of successful initiatives. The unit is a safer, more orderly place and the rate of exclusions has continued to fall significantly. Two students gained the Duke of Edinburgh silver award recently. A group of boys in Year 10 has made supportive and encouraging friendships. This is less so, however, for the current group of girls. Overall, despite some improvements, the students' personal development remains too low. For example, the social skills which will be important in future life are not always sufficiently in evidence, sometimes due to a lack of confidence.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006:

- Continue to improve the pupils' attendance, punctuality and personal development – inadequate progress.

Quality of provision

As identified in the January inspection, the unit's curriculum has some strengths. These include improved openings for work experience, good opportunities for sport and exercise, a link with a local boat club and Skill Force activities. Basic skills in literacy and numeracy are promoted fairly well, and students recognise this. However, the curriculum overall is not relevant enough to the students, or geared to meet their diverse individual needs. There are not enough opportunities for students to develop personal, enterprise and life skills, such as independence, teamwork, proficiency in social situations and taking responsibility. For example, students are actively discouraged from making their own toast or drinks at morning break-time. They are not reminded enough of basic courtesies like saying 'please' and 'thank you', or helped to see why this matters. Although the unit has tutorial systems and personal learning plans, these are not effective enough. Understandably, therefore, students do not always see the point of lessons and activities, and can feel that they are not succeeding. In a unit survey, less than two out of every five students saw themselves as responding effectively to the demands of the curriculum.

The unit rightly continues to involve a range of agencies. The Connexions service supports and guides students, ensuring they continue their education, or start employment, after leaving Project 16. The unit has developed its procedures for encouraging and recording attendance, including home visits, well-kept registers, telephone calls home to follow up absences and the involvement of the Education Welfare Service. The learning mentor meets and greets the students positively which helps them to start their day constructively.

Teaching remains satisfactory with good features. Relationships in lessons are constructive and planning has improved, ensuring that time is used well. Many students remain too dependent on the adults and, whilst some are highly motivated, others are slow to settle to work. In many lessons, a lack of individual learning targets for students, based on assessment, continues to reduce progress. Nevertheless, in one mathematics lesson observed, very effective feedback was given by the teacher about the GCSE grade level of each question a student was answering, which he found motivating.

Leadership and management

The acting head of the centre, and her acting deputy, provide vital dependability at a time of potential insecurity. They ensure that the needs of students are paramount and evaluate the quality of the unit's work accurately, though there is a need to appraise teaching more robustly. Some improvements have followed. For example, much more detailed records now exist for each student and are discussed with them. Although at an early stage, this is a great improvement, achieved very quickly. Behaviour has improved through the development of effective behaviour management, anti-bullying and weapons policies. However, the necessary radical changes to the curriculum have not been organised, though the unit's behaviour consultant, working with others, has helpfully begun to think this through. The unit's Action Plan outlines procedures but is not clear about how provision and outcomes for students are to be improved.

The management advisory group is committed, well led and appropriately organised, although without a current parent representative. It is now receiving better information about students' progress, which enables members to see the curriculum needs more clearly.

A substantive deputy head has been appointed for September. However, a process to appoint a permanent head of centre was not successful. Overall, progress in improving leadership and management is insufficient. This is not a reflection on the work done by the acting leaders, which is clearly effective on a day-to-day basis. The lack of progress is caused instead by the fragility and temporary nature of the current situation and the fact that future plans are not secure or strategic enough. This creates uncertainty which hinders overall improvement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006:

- Improve systems and procedures to assess the pupils' achievements and track their progress – good progress.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels so that monitoring and evaluation of the work of the centre are more effective and systems and procedures are implemented rigorously and consistently - inadequate progress.

External support

The LA's appointed contractor, CEA@Islington, supports the unit actively, providing staffing and some helpful guidance. Its Project Group has dealt with some important management issues effectively. However, it has held back

from guiding the unit to plan the strategic curriculum changes needed. There is too little emphasis on promoting educational improvement. Accordingly, The LA's statement of action, produced by CEA, identifies some helpful basic support but does not show clearly how the contractor should help the unit to improve students' outcomes. It has become outdated quickly, is insufficiently detailed and has limited scope.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action – inadequate.

The LA should address the weaknesses identified and prepare amendments by the second monitoring inspection.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the unit's curriculum, so that this becomes more relevant, motivating and personal to each student. (This will become a key issue, in the provision section, for evaluation in future monitoring visits)
- For September 2006, improve initial assessment and induction procedures, so that each student who joins can quickly feel part of the unit and take advantage of what is offered, as appropriate to their interests and needs
- Secure firmer arrangements for the future leadership and management of the unit

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the management advisory group and the Director of Children's Services for Islington.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
HM Inspector