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Mr Patrick Eames
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Dear Mr Eames

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF PROJECT 16 PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

Introduction

Following my visit with Stuart Charlton, Additional Inspector, to your unit on 14 and 15 November 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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

Inspectors observed the unit's work, scrutinised documents and met with the unit head and acting deputy head, unit staff, students, representatives of CEA@Islington, Islington police and the Connexions service.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new permanent headteacher has started work. The acting deputy has continued in his role, whilst working on some days in Islington's other pupil referral units. A small number of Year 10 students joined in September 2006 and the total roll is now 29.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievements are directly related to their levels of attendance. The majority of students attend regularly and their achievement is at least satisfactory and for many it is good. The achievement of those who attend less regularly is unsatisfactory. For the majority of students, compared to their performance in previous schools, this represents a considerable improvement, although standards remain well below national average. Many enter for GCSE examinations and in 2006, 62 per cent attained at least one GCSE grade A* to G and 14 per cent attained at least one A* to C grade. Student destinations after leaving the unit are carefully tracked by the Connexions service, with most moving on to further education or training.

Personal development and well-being

Strategies introduced or further developed this term have raised the self-esteem of students, ensuring a climate for effective learning. Behaviour at Project 16 has continued to improve and is good. This is helped by the way staff calmly and consistently apply the behaviour policies. Students' comments such as, 'they listen to us' show that they value the support staff give to help them manage their own behaviour and involve them in their learning.

The attendance of the majority of students has improved very well. Some have moved from hardly coming to the unit at all to nearly full time attendance in less than a term. Overall, attendance is about 75%, compared to about 50% at the last monitoring inspection. This is helped by a well-founded rewards system, as well as the motivating curriculum improvements outlined in the next section. There are good systems for checking absences on the first day, but these are not as effective where students attend courses which are off-site.

Many students are not sufficiently aware of the importance that being on time may have in their life after school. Punctuality at the start of the day and to lessons remains inadequate. It has been helped somewhat by the recently introduced morning tutorial period, which students generally enjoy. At present, however, there is too little consistency or structure for this time. Staff do not have all the necessary expertise, particularly in the teaching of reading, to ensure that it is fully effective.

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

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

Quality of provision

The curriculum has improved impressively since the previous monitoring inspection, becoming much more relevant and motivating for most students. For example, new opportunities are available in personal, social and health education (PSHE), music, dance, physical education (PE), food technology, health and beauty, fashion and building. Some courses are provided in the unit; others at various local providers. These courses enhance students' personal, enterprise and life skills, though the unit has not identified clearly how these aspects are progressively developed and assessed. Most courses offered are award-bearing but staff and students are not always sure, at this early stage, which qualifications each student is aiming for. The strengths in the curriculum identified at the last monitoring inspection have been maintained and sometimes improved. For example, provision for work experience, and literacy and numeracy, is good.

The quality of teaching and learning within the unit is good. It is less consistent in those parts of the programme which are taught offsite, where there are some problems for the unit's students in receiving the teaching they need. Since September, the unit has begun to use its own staff to monitor the effectiveness of the off-site provision, though this is at an early stage. Teaching in Project 16 is helped by the good relationships between staff and students. Lessons are carefully structured and relevant to the students, who the staff know well. Although planning is detailed, it is often related to content rather than meeting individual student's needs. The use of the unit's good assessment information to support planning is not well enough developed. In information communication technology (ICT) lessons, the teaching is less effective because it is based on theory more than practice, so the students don't always see the point of it.

The care and guidance provided to students has also improved. Students are now better encouraged to take appropriate personal responsibility and to see the importance of basic courtesy and consideration for others. Senior staff deal calmly, fairly and robustly with any specific issues or concerns, such as behaviour outside the unit which could impact inside the unit. Helpful feedback and support is given in and out of lessons, and students are safeguarded appropriately with proper attention given to risk assessments.

Progress on the additional area for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in June 2006:

- Improve the unit's curriculum, so that this becomes more relevant, motivating and personal to each student – good progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are now on a much firmer footing. The new headteacher has made a very good start. His clear educational vision for Project 16, and well-focused enthusiasm, has led to the improvements identified in this letter. He has built on his predecessors' work, quickly gaining the loyalty of the staff. The students look up to him because he is always opening doors for them, actively finding better opportunities. Indeed, they respect all members of staff, usually seeing the good work being done to help them.

The acting deputy continues to provide strong support. In particular, his analysis of data and information about the students' academic progress, and their attitudes to learning, is exemplary, and is leading to higher standards. Other staff with responsibilities contribute helpfully, whilst the headteacher is working effectively to extend the fruitful links with agencies such as Connexions, the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the local police.

Many developments, whilst productive, are at an early stage and need stronger management arrangements. For instance, the new tutorial sessions in the morning help make a positive start to the day, but staff are not clear enough about how to structure and organise them. Within the students' useful personal files, it is not made clear which courses and qualifications each young person is following. The unit's improving self-evaluation is honest and constructive. However, whilst the analysis of assessment data is very strong, insufficient evidence is gathered and collated about other key areas such as the quality of teaching and learning in the unit, the standard of courses provided externally and students' personal development. In turn, this means the improvement plan is less refined than it might be. Although it contains useful actions to improve provision, these are not always sufficiently specific, and the intended impact of the actions on students' learning and well-being is not defined clearly enough.

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

- 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 - satisfactory progress

- Improve systems and procedures to assess the pupils' achievements and track their progress - good progress. Academic progress and key incidents are tracked in an excellent way; but there is further work needed on the assessment of personal development, enterprise and life skills.

External support

Support from the LA, provided by CEA@Islington, is now very good. It is much better than before because there has been a necessary radical change of focus to the curriculum and improving student outcomes. The revised statement of action is clear and well implemented. Anticipated future support with self-evaluation of teaching and learning is well planned. The Project Group, which provides governance for the unit, offers strong expertise. Rightly, there is now a move towards involving more lay and community representatives. The LA now has a clearer strategy for all its pupil referral units, providing an improved context for Project 16 to take practical improvement actions.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

The unit continues to require special measures.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that initiatives and developments are underpinned by more robust management arrangements.
- Develop self-evaluation processes, so that the unit can identify more readily for itself specific areas of strength and improvement needs.
- Improve students' punctuality.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
H M Inspector