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29 November 2006

Dear Mr Snowden

OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WHOSE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS HAS BEEN JUDGED SATISFACTORY

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I visited your centre on 28 November 2006, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to those students and staff who met with me and to the school's advisor for the time she gave.

As a result of the inspection on 16 and 17 November 2005, the centre was asked to improve three areas of its work: decreasing the number of exclusions by improving the behaviour management skills of staff; increasing the rigour of monitoring and evaluation and raising the attainment of students, particularly that of higher ability students, by improving teachers' subject knowledge and skills.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the centre is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement.

At the time of the inspection the centre had been established for fourteen months. For the first year there was no deputy headteacher and because of staffing difficulties the headteacher had a full teaching commitment. The centre is now fully staffed and the headteacher can focus on his leadership role. Most staff had previously been employed in the predecessor school and lacked both the subject knowledge and behaviour management strategies to effectively meet the needs of students at the centre. All staff have now received specialist training to help them manage the sometimes challenging behaviour of students. During the visit most of the behaviour seen was good and any potentially disruptive behaviour was managed very effectively by

staff. The number of exclusions has been significantly reduced, to single figures in the current term, and students are now only excluded for the most serious incidents.

Most students have suffered disruption to their education. As a result attainment on entry is well below that seen nationally. Even the most able students have significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. Students are taught in three separate classes and remain with the same teacher for much of the day. This successfully promotes good behaviour and attitudes but requires staff to deliver the full curriculum. Some teachers have never taught the national curriculum or are teaching subjects which are new to them. The headteacher is well aware of this and has taken steps to ensure that non specialists are well supported. Detailed curriculum plans have been written and all staff have received additional training. As a result lessons are carefully planned and are differentiated to meet individual needs. Additional support is provided for reading and basic literacy skills and most students receive a great deal of one-to-one teaching. There are plans in place to meet the needs of exceptionally able students should the need arise. Students of all abilities now make at least satisfactory progress.

Teachers have high expectations for all aspects of personal development and for the presentation of work. However, teaching is sometimes a little dull because some staff do not challenge students sufficiently or present learning in the most interesting ways. In some lessons there is an over reliance on undemanding worksheets and students have too few opportunities to evaluate their work. When tasks are more demanding most students respond well.

Systems are now in place to evaluate the work of the centre. Information on attendance, exclusions and the progress made in literacy is collected and evaluated. However, given the nature of the provision any evaluation of progress can only be made on a short term basis and for the current cohort of students. Comparisons with most national benchmarks are unhelpful. The centre is aware that it must establish its own tracking systems in order to accurately evidence the progress pupils have made. The headteacher monitors teaching on a regular basis and staff are given guidance on what might be improved. However, these observations are not sufficiently well targeted to improve teaching and learning at a brisk enough pace. The relatively new system of peer observations has been well received by staff.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector