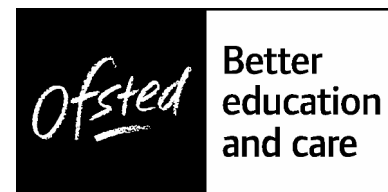


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12 January 2007

Ms Helen Whitehead
Teacher-in-Charge
Ashdale Centre
Marton Road
Middlesborough
TS4 3RX

Dear Ms Whitehead,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ASHDALE CENTRE

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 10 January 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings. The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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

During the visit six part lessons and the breakfast club were observed. Documents were scrutinised and meetings were held with the new teacher-in-charge, the deputy teacher-in-charge, the interim leadership team, other staff, students and representatives of the local authority (LA).

Context

The interim leadership team continued to manage the centre during the autumn term and is to work in the centre during the transition period in order to provide stability. However, the time spent on site will be significantly reduced. The new teacher-in charge took up her post on the first day of the spring term. The deputy teacher-in-charge has had her role and responsibilities temporarily extended in order to strengthen the leadership of the centre. A new management structure has been drawn up and is presently under consideration by the council. Two members of staff who previously worked in the centre on a supply basis have been given temporary contracts until the end of the summer term in order to further stabilise staffing.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain low. The students currently in the centre have suffered great disruption to their education. All students have a history of underachievement and disaffection. In addition many are reluctant to attend lessons in the core subjects and those who do attend more regularly have very little confidence and are difficult to motivate. As a result many have not made enough progress. Although a small number of students are meeting the requirements of their GCSE courses, some have failed to meet course demands because of personal issues. However, there are some encouraging signs. Changes made to the timetable mean that more students now attend centre-based lessons and, as the result of the good teaching and support they receive, participate with increasing confidence in learning and assessment. These students make good progress given their starting points and staff are now able accurately to assess their current levels of achievement and plan work which meets their needs.

Significant gains have been made in the area of vocational training. Students are much more enthusiastic and positive about this type of learning; they attend regularly, develop a range of skills, knowledge and understanding and produce work of good quality. Their achievements have a very positive impact on their attitude and self-esteem. They enjoy this aspect of their learning and achieve well. Most are working towards nationally accredited qualifications and are acquiring a good understanding of workplace skills and health and safety. They are given very good opportunities to improve the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and they demonstrate increasing maturity and a sense of responsibility. Most students attending college courses have secure, achievable and realistic plans for progression post 16.

Students are now assessed on entry to the centre and data is collected from the mainstream school. There is some tracking of students' progress but this is currently limited to target setting based on achievement at Key Stages 2 and 3. This is not yet sophisticated enough to measure the impact of the centre's work on individual students, nor is there any mechanism to track progress outside of the core subjects. For example, there is no summative record of the gains which have been made in basic skills, attendance, parental involvement, personal development, behaviour and attitudes.

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of students continue to improve. The behaviour of students is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Staff have high expectations and are becoming increasingly skilled at recognising and averting some potentially difficult situations. When behaviour is inappropriate most students now respond very quickly to reminders. However, these improvements are the result of the staff's effective strategies for managing behaviour; many students are not yet able to manage their behaviour without support. The ethos of the centre is still very fragile and students are easily unsettled during periods of change. In order to

maintain the improvements made to teaching, learning and behaviour there is still a need to remove some students from the centre for short periods of time. Usually this is to ensure that their own health and safety or that of others is not compromised or to ensure that learning is not disrupted. During the autumn term the number of fixed-term exclusions was significantly reduced although it is still high. However, the amount of time that students remained out of the centre was much shorter than in the same term in 2005 and fewer individuals were excluded.

Attendance is unsatisfactory. However, it remains stable and has improved slightly overall. It is now 55%, which represents a significant improvement on the 30% recorded at the time of the inspection of March 2006. At the time of the last visit 14 students had not attended for much of the previous year and the centre was unable to locate some of them. Most of these students are now attending and are clear as to what is expected of them. Systems to track attendance and analyse the data collected are much improved. As a result staff have identified that attendance at vocational training is high, with some students attending every session. Where attendance has been less good students were sometimes required to attend external meetings during the time allocated to training. This issue has been resolved so students can now benefit from the opportunities available to them. Students are more reluctant to attend lessons regularly in the core subjects and there is a small group of students whose attendance is very erratic. New timetables have been written and there are some early indications that students are responding positively to them.

Significant gains have been made in the personal development of some students. Those students seen during the visit are deriving maximum benefits from vocational training and the external accredited qualifications they gain. They demonstrate increased confidence and self-esteem, very good behaviour, politeness and social skills and a very much improved capacity for future economic well-being. The 'Goalz' project provides further and additional support to prepare students for the workplace. However, students do not have enough opportunities to voice their ideas and opinions about the work of the centre. There is a student council but there are no regular meeting or opportunities for them to work together. While it is evident from talking with students in the centre that they are not yet comfortable in meetings of this kind, with encouragement, they can express their opinions.

Links with parents are much improved. Twenty three parents attended a recent parents meeting at the centre and some attended other meetings arranged by the college. This is a very significant sign of success since many have to travel some distance in order to attend and some have had difficulties in the past when working with their children's schools.

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

- Improve the attendance and behaviour of pupils – good progress

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory and sometimes good. In the best lessons teachers are able to motivate even the most disaffected students and they are persuaded to work. Appropriate demands are placed upon students and they are given good opportunities to develop oral and written skills. There is a clear sense of purpose, the pace of lessons is good and teachers expect students to achieve. In one lesson learning objectives were shared with the students and evaluated at the end of the lesson to check that they had been achieved. In other lessons students were encouraged to evaluate their own learning and, although this is at an early stage, it is allowing students to reflect on their achievements. The quality of support provided by teaching assistants is variable. Where this support is used well students make rapid progress because of the good feedback they receive and the skilled avoidance of any potential barriers to learning. Where it is less successful students are given too few opportunities to tackle tasks independently. This was clear in a lesson where a student was given too much support. He eventually complained that the task was 'too easy'. When the support was reduced and greater challenge provided he made rapid progress. Teaching is now more consistent between classes and subjects. Students who made good progress in a mathematics lesson because of the good teaching they received continued to make good progress in the next lesson because the teaching was as good and the staff were consistent in their expectations.

During the visit lessons were observed at the college and in the centre. While it is clear that students at the college are much more confident and highly motivated, all students made good progress given their starting points. The learning of many students has been considerably disrupted in the core subjects but, with more regular attendance, they begin to respond positively to questioning and assessments. Many have a reasonable understanding of basic concepts although there are gaps in their knowledge. When students begin to succeed in lessons they become less anxious and the atmosphere in class becomes more relaxed. Many students are now completing work with great care and attention to detail.

The care, support and guidance given to students are strengths of the centre. The individual support they receive provides good academic, social and moral guidance and a high level of care and nurturing. Students are responding very well to this and the gains which have been made are evident. Students treat the building and resources with respect and are usually polite and well mannered in their dealings with staff. Some students have long and troubled histories of drug or alcohol abuse or are involved with the Youth Offending Team. The centre does all that it can to help students deal with these issues.

A more motivating and enriched curriculum has been developed and there is an appropriate balance between the core subjects, vocational training and personal and social education. Timetables are structured in order to ensure that students are allocated their full entitlement of provision, although not all choose to access this. A great many educational opportunities are provided for students but this can become

somewhat fragmented and not enough use is made of achievements in one area to support learning in another. Students do not always recognise how their achievements at college can support work in the core subjects. Teachers give good oral feedback but the quality of written marking at the centre is less well developed. Work completed at college receives a written comment and grade and students are proud of this.

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

- Provide greater challenge through more rigorous target setting, higher expectations for pupils' learning and improved subject expertise – satisfactory progress
- Strengthen the centre's procedures to ensure that the safety and well-being of pupils are secured – good progress
- Develop a more motivating and enriched curriculum with a balance between the core subjects and accredited vocational opportunities – good progress

Leadership and management

The substantive teacher-in-charge has made an effective start. The LA arranged very effective induction procedures and, despite having been in post for only five days, she already has a secure understanding of the work of the centre and a clear view of next steps. Students have had opportunities to meet with her and this has ensured that the transition period is as smooth as possible. Her decision to teach is doing much to improve the quality of teaching.

The deputy teacher-in-charge is rapidly developing effective leadership skills. She has a very good understanding of the work of the centre, has the respect of staff and speaks with determination and authority. She has successfully reorganised the teaching of mathematics and, alongside the teacher-in-charge, has evaluated timetables and restructured them in order to meet the changing needs. Barriers to further improvement have been identified and measures have been taken to overcome them. Her high expectations for both behaviour and achievement ensure that students make good progress and acquire very positive attitudes towards learning.

The centre is demonstrating an increasing capacity for further improvement. The leadership team is collecting a good deal of information and beginning to use it effectively to improve provision. The interim senior team has provided very effective leadership and key staff are skilled and knowledgeable. The centre is now well placed to improve the achievements of students.

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

- Provide a strong leadership team to facilitate improvements in leadership and management at all levels, and to boost pupils' achievement and personal development – good progress

External support

The LA arranged for the new teacher-in-charge to work in the centre for at least one day a week during the half term prior to her taking up her post. This combined with the effective transition arrangements has ensured that the change of leadership is accomplished with as little disruption as possible. The LA will continue to support the new teacher-in-charge and monitor the work of the leadership team. The school improvement partner has had an initial meeting with the substantive teacher-in-charge. The school's attached inspector continues to spend a good quantity of time in the centre and has provided detailed and rigorous evaluations of teaching and learning. These provide good guidance for individual staff on what must be improved and how this might be accomplished. Effective training and staff development address the main areas of weaknesses but not enough has been done to role-model effective teaching for staff.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good progress

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good progress

Priorities for further improvement

- Track the achievements of individuals and identify the progress which has been made.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the management committee and the Corporate Director of Education and Leisure for Middlesbrough.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
H M Inspector