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Mr Robin Campbell  
Access to Learning  
Brierton Hill  
Brierton Lane  
Hartlepool  
TS25 4BY

Dear Mr Campbell

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 September 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. In particular, please pass on my thanks to the pupils who gave their time to talk with me.

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.

As a result of the inspection in January 2007, the school was asked to:

- Work closely with the local authority to ensure pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD) have their education in a school-based environment where the full National Curriculum is available
- Improve attendance
- Improve teaching so that more is of good quality
- Improve standards and the rate of progress made by pupils
- Improve the curriculum and management of curriculum subjects.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Satisfactory progress has been made in developing appropriate provision for pupils experiencing EBD. An interim agreement has been established between the local authority and a 'partner' special school. This link has been essential in providing strong leadership and the capacity to maintain improvements. The pupils are responding to a more appropriate curriculum, enjoy attending and are making satisfactory progress in their learning. Although the pupils have not moved buildings, they have their own teaching areas and most of their lessons are taught by subject specialists. Also, they have their lunch and physical education lessons in the special school. Pupils' ideas have contributed to the improvements in the unit's accommodation and they display increasing respect for their surroundings.

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving pupils' attendance. The systems to monitor and promote attendance are more robust and, as a result, attendance is close to 90% this term. A marked decrease in the use of fixed-term exclusions is helping to boost attendance and is an indication of the positive ethos in the unit. Good attendance is recognised and celebrated and most pupils share in the drive to improve further. There is increased contact with parents and this is helping to strengthen their understanding of the importance of good attendance.

There has been satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Assessment is more rigorous, helping to ensure that pupils' work is neither too easy nor too hard. The quality of pupils' work has improved since the inspection. In the lessons seen there was an appropriate focus on promoting pupils' speaking and listening skills, rather than too much teacher talk. Limitations in resources and lower levels of challenge still, occasionally, slow down the pace of learning. However, there is enough good teaching and learning to provide the drive for further improvements. The increasing links with mainstream schools are helping to develop teaching skills.

There have been satisfactory improvements in the rate of pupils' progress. Excluded pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress as teaching is brisk, purposeful and ambitious. The pupils experiencing EBD at the end of Year 9 made adequate progress in their national tests in mathematics and science but not in English. However, these pupils are now making satisfactory progress in their GCSE English. Accreditation for the Key Stage 4 pupils has been extended and is now satisfactory. For example, pupils are making good progress in their short courses in history and citizenship. The need to improve pupils' reading skills remains a priority.

Satisfactory progress has been made in relation to the curriculum. Significantly, many of the excluded pupils have been returned to mainstream schools and there are procedures to ensure that pupils do not remain in the unit for a prolonged period. Teachers have new job descriptions which include the responsibility for managing their subject. Basic subject development plans are also contributing to further improvements to the curriculum.

The local authority has been proactive in its support for Access to Learning. There are confirmed plans for the pupil referral unit to focus on Key Stage 3 pupils, whilst pupils experiencing EBD are to move onto the partner special school's site.

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

Yours sincerely

David Smith  
Additional Inspector