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Mrs Christine Fairless
Pathways Special School
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Dear Mrs Fairless

SPECIAL MEASURES MONITORING INSPECTION OF PATHWAYS SPECIAL SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 October 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Adult and Children's Services for Redcar and Cleveland.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF PATHWAYS SPECIAL SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 October 2007.

Evidence

The HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and other teachers, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority. Informal discussions were held with pupils.

Context

The school has expanded the senior leadership team since its inspection. The team includes a part-time temporary consultant as well as teachers. Staffing has stabilised, although a significant proportion of the staff are new to the school this term. There have been major developments in the school building. These include the creation of additional classrooms in the main part of the building as well as the adaptation of part of the building for vocational education. Vocational courses are at an early stage of implementation, as the facilities are have yet to be completed and staffed fully.

Achievement and standards

There is no significant change in the standards pupils reach or in their achievement since the time of the school's inspection. Standards are below average, and well below average in some subjects, notably English at Key Stages 3 and 4. Results in the 2007 Key Stage 3 national tests showed that pupils achieved higher results in mathematics and science than in English. Most Year 11 pupils achieved some accreditation for the courses they followed, and three achieved a short course GCSE pass in English studies and art and design. Overall however, pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 still do not achieve enough. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 generally make satisfactory progress. Pupils make satisfactory progress in those lessons where teachers are skilful in managing behaviour and provide appropriate and purposeful activities.

Staffing difficulties have hindered the school's attempts to raise standards in English. A number of actions have been taken, including an increased focus on guided reading, but there is no coherent strategy for raising standards which sets out how the various actions fit together. There is insufficient coordination and scrutiny of planning to structure pupils' learning, especially at Key Stages 3 and 4. Information on pupils' prior achievement is too imprecise and not used consistently to ensure that pupils build on what they already know and can do.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Raise standards in English in Key Stages 3 and 4 – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

This visit focused mainly on pupils' behaviour, attendance and attitudes, areas of particular concern at the time of the inspection. Behaviour has improved. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced since the time of the inspection, although the number so far this term is similar to the corresponding period last year. Instances of serious misbehaviour persist, as well as disruptions to lessons because of immature and unruly behaviour. However, senior staff note that they are spending less time dealing with major incidents. There are some early indications that the behaviour and attitudes of older students are improving as a result of a range of strategies the school is adopting. In particular, older pupils are enjoying the opportunities for vocational studies and activities which they perceive to be more relevant to them. Pupils were adopting safe practices in the practical lessons observed during the inspection, under close adult supervision.

The attendance of individual pupils has improved, including some whose attendance has improved in response to the new courses provided for them. However, overall attendance figures remain similar to the low figures at the time of the inspection. These figures are adversely affected by a group of particularly challenging Year 11 pupils, whose attendance is very low. The full impact of the strategies the school has adopted to improve attendance has yet to be seen. These strategies include first-day calls to parents and carers as well as targets for pupils. Although the school's attendance records have improved, neither the data nor its analysis is yet robust. High absence rates and low basic skills mean pupils remain poorly equipped for their futures.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Improve attendance – satisfactory
- Improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes – satisfactory

Quality of provision

Teaching remains satisfactory overall. As at the time of the inspection, one of the reasons why it does not translate into satisfactory achievement is because attendance is not yet good enough to secure sufficient learning. The best lessons have interesting activities which engage pupils and which are pitched at the right level to promote their learning. In these lessons, teachers work hard to build good relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour appropriately. There is good use of praise to motivate pupils and build their self-esteem, and some helpful feedback to pupils. In most lessons, teaching assistants and support teachers work well in partnership with the teachers to meet the needs of individual pupils. Some support is too intensive, so that pupils achieve too little by themselves. Lessons are planned to a school format, but the lesson outcomes are often expressed as activities which pupils will complete. There is insufficient clarity about the intended learning outcomes for pupils. In addition, although lesson plans highlight key words, there is no indication that these link to a whole-school approach to support pupils' literacy skills. Some teaching is inadequate, mainly because it is not planned sufficiently to meet pupils' needs and build on their prior learning. The school has insufficient detailed information on pupils' achievements. Hence the use of assessment to plan the next steps of pupils' learning is too variable.

The school has increased the length of the school day and the amount of time for lessons now meets statutory requirements. A small number of pupils, mainly in Years 10 and 11, are not on full timetables partly because alternative provision is not yet in place for some days. The school has taken steps towards ensuring that statutory requirements are met at Key Stages 3 and 4. Improvements include provision for religious education and citizenship, but these have to be implemented fully. Provision for music for pupils above primary age remains minimal, although the school has provided a short programme. The school has developed its curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4, to widen the courses available to pupils and increase their relevance. As noted above, there are early benefits in the attendance and attitudes of some pupils. One vocational course, construction, is available at present with more scheduled; accreditation routes have yet to be finalised. An alternative curriculum for some Key Stage 3 pupils is evolving, but has yet to be matched against statutory requirements and the other courses which pupils follow.

Day-to-day pastoral care and support for pupils are satisfactory overall and good in some instances. However, not all individual pupil records are up to date. The reviews of the progress pupils have made in relation to the targets set on their personal plans are often imprecise. Academic guidance remains a weakness. The school's new tracking system has the potential to improve this and enable the school to monitor pupils' progress, but it is only just being established. The school's procedures for safeguarding learners do not meet current requirements as its records are not up to date for all staff.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Increase the time given to pupils' education and ensure that the statutory requirements for the curriculum are met – satisfactory
- Create more and better opportunities for Key Stage 4 pupils to achieve success – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The school's senior leadership team has taken steps to bring about improvement since the inspection, with varied success. This has been done in the context of significant staff absences which have placed additional demands on the time of the headteacher and deputy headteacher in particular. Early indications are that the expansion of the senior leadership team is enabling work in some areas to progress more quickly, harnessing the enthusiasm of staff and building capacity. However, there are no precise job descriptions to focus the work of the senior team and form the basis of performance management.

The school's monitoring of its own performance remains weak. There are no procedures to ensure, for example, that lessons or pupils' work are monitored systematically. The school cannot at present provide clear evidence to demonstrate the amount of progress which pupils are making. Hence the school still does not have robust evidence by which to evaluate its own performance. The school's improvement plan incorporates actions to address the areas of weakness identified in the inspection, and progress has been highlighted. However, the plan is overly complex and actions to be undertaken and their impact are not sufficiently well aligned; some are unrealistic. Few measurable outcomes are identified.

There are early indications that the strengthening of the governing body by additional governors appointed by the local authority is beneficial. However, it is too early for any tangible benefit or for this to have improved significantly the governors' capacity to hold the school to account. Training to equip governors for their role is in hand.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Monitor performance thoroughly to provide information for more accurate self-evaluation – inadequate

External support

The local authority's support has been satisfactory overall, including its support for governance noted above. It has now made a clear statement about the future of the school, confirming that there are no plans to close or federate the school. The work of advisers and consultants in the school has helped staff with improvements, such as the development of a tracking system and support for the Primary National Strategy. Some of this support is not fully aligned with the actions scheduled in its plan for this stage, but has proved beneficial. The partnership between the school and the local authority has yet to become sufficiently effective in moving the school forward.

Priorities for further improvement

- Simplify and align the plans for improvement to focus on priorities, build partnership and make best use of the resources of both the school and the local authority.
- Improve the monitoring of school by the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Create a clear and coherent strategy to improve literacy throughout the school and raise standards in English, especially in Key Stages 3 and 4