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Mr R Barker
The Acting Headteacher
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Dear Roger

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 31 October 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Could you please pass on my thanks to those staff and students who I met and to the chair of the management committee for the time he gave 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 on 13 March 2007, the school was asked to:

- raise the achievement of pupils by ensuring that all receive the amount of time in education to which they are entitled
- improve pupils' writing skills
- establish assessment systems so that the PRU is aware of how well pupils are doing
- establish a management committee to challenge and support the staff.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the PRU has made inadequate progress in addressing the points for improvement. This visit has raised very serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the PRU and I am recommending a return visit.

There has been no consistent leadership of the PRU for some time and, although an acting headteacher was appointed in September, this has had a major impact on the PRU's ability to move forward. Whilst the day to day management is satisfactory there are serious weaknesses in provision. Most importantly, there is a lack of

strategic planning to support developments. This is reflected in the fact that, whilst a new site has been found for the PRU, there has been no effective planning to ensure a smooth transition to the new site at the start of next term. The new accommodation will enable the PRU to offer pupils their full entitlement, but although proposals have been made to introduce a more vocational curriculum, there has been no strategic planning in terms of putting in place staffing and resources that will support this and the change to full time provision. As a result, the PRU's ability to offer a 25 hour curriculum is not evident and progress towards addressing this key issue is limited. As an interim arrangement this term, the PRU has spent considerable time in trying to provide lunch facilities for pupils in an effort to keep them on site and extend the time they have in the PRU. As yet this has been unsuccessful and the quality of food so unsatisfactory that pupils have complained and go off site to get their lunch.

The end of year results confirm that achievements remain unsatisfactory. Whilst a small number of pupils gained GCSEs and passes in entry level accreditation, nearly half left the PRU with no qualifications at all. Pupils' achievements are greatly affected by their very low attendance rates. Data for the first half term of this academic year shows that few pupils attend for more than 50% of the time and several do not attend at all.

The recent appointment of an English coordinator has enabled the PRU to start addressing the issue of improving writing skills and, whilst satisfactory progress has been made, the PRU has rightly recognised that there is a need to improve pupils' skills in all aspects of literacy. There is an improved focus on developing pupils' reading and spelling skills, both in English and other subjects. Staff as a whole are beginning to be involved in extending pupils' skills and the good working relationships between teachers and their commitment to develop pupils' skills constitute a strength of the PRU. However, progress in the use of assessment has been limited, partly because teachers have lacked sufficient support in using the systems. Teachers record the skills pupils gain in lessons but had not, until very recently, checked what skills pupils arrived with in order to measure the progress they make whilst at the PRU. Although academic targets have been set in pupils' individual education plans, these are very recent and are not being used to enable pupils to make better progress and ensure that work in the class is matched to pupils' wide ranging abilities.

The role of the management committee of the PRU's sister unit has been extended to cover Burton PRU. In its new role, the joint management committee (JMC) has held two meetings and the chair is aware of the need to support Burton PRU. As yet though, there have been no visits to the PRU to meet pupils and staff. Whilst the establishment of the JMC is appropriate, its ability to challenge the PRU is greatly reduced by the fact that the PRU has no effective systems by which to measure its effectiveness. At present there are no systems for gathering data and checking the progress pupils are making. Other systems, such as checking on the quality of teaching and other aspects of provision, are also inadequate.

The local authority has provided some support to the PRU and has been effective in establishing a management committee and financing the upgrading of the new site. However, the lack of strategic planning in some aspects of provision has meant that the impact of the support has not been effective in enabling the PRU to move forward at a faster pace in all areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascal
Additional Inspector