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Mrs H Yonwin
The Acting Headteacher
Learning Support Service
Dolphin Centre
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Dear Mrs Yonwin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LEARNING SUPPORT SERVICE

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 2008, 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 October 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 the management committee and the Director of Education for Poole.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF Learning Support Service

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 12 March 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the local authority strategy manager, the acting headteacher, groups of students and the chair and vice-chair of the management committee.

Context

Since the inspection in October 2007, the previous headteacher has left. A local authority officer acted as an interim headteacher until a headteacher was seconded from a local middle school. She took up her post in February 2008 and will remain until the end of the summer term 2008, when it is hoped a permanent headteacher will be appointed. A teacher, learning support assistant and administration officer have also left. A youth worker/learning mentor now works full time at the Years 9, 10 and 11 bases.

Achievement and standards

There has been only very limited progress in improving students' achievement, which remains inadequate. The little amount of completed students' work available makes it difficult for staff to know the rates of progress students are making. Some assessments have been undertaken in English, mathematics and science and for a few students a second set of science tests have been taken. The results have not been evaluated to show what progress students have made. One student has been able to return to a mainstream school but other students have not made sufficient progress to be able to do this.

Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development remains inadequate despite some students improving their attendance, particularly to the morning sessions. Attendance at the afternoon sessions is still poor. Many students demonstrate an unwillingness to adopt healthy lifestyles by choosing to smoke on site and in the view of staff. Students make some appreciative comments about the support staff give them but most show little enjoyment in their work, often needing considerable persuasion to complete pieces of work. Students show positive aspects in their behaviour, for example by willingly joining an informal discussion with the inspector. Records show, though, that behaviour is not always appropriate and often poor behaviour has a negative impact on teaching and learning.

Quality of provision

A start has been made to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It is now expected that teachers will plan their lessons. However, these plans, whilst giving a

structure to the lesson, do not take account of students' individual needs their previous learning. The expectations staff have for students' achievement remain low.

The curriculum provides students with sufficient time to study English, mathematics, and science and aspects of personal, social and health education. Time for information and communication technology is limited, however. Insufficient opportunities are available for physical activities and the arts. Some students benefit from, and enjoy, activities with outside training providers and a few take part in work experiences. Opportunities for vocational training are still very limited. The activities on offer each afternoon are often not successful in encouraging students to remain on site.

The youth worker/learning mentor has had a positive impact on the quality of pastoral support provided for students, but the aspirations for students' academic and personal development remain too low. Individual education plans are being developed but, as yet, do not provide students with challenging targets that can be used to improve and demonstrate their progress. Although a key worker system has been set up to allow individual tutorials, in practice, staff have not completed these. As a result, students receive too little guidance on what they need to do to improve their achievements. The almost total absence of marking and a lack of consistency in advising students on how to improve their work also have a negative impact.

Although the concerns expressed in the previous report with regard to ensuring the safety of students have been addressed, safeguarding procedures remain inadequate. This is because risk assessments of individual students and all activities have not been completed. In addition, where they have been undertaken and high risks identified, no action has been taken to address them.

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

- ensure that safeguarding procedures comply with current requirements – inadequate
- raise expectations of pupils' academic achievements and personal development, for example by setting and tracking challenging individual targets – inadequate.

Leadership and management

A start has been made to improving the quality of leadership and management and to ensuring that they are having a positive impact on students' achievements. Changes have been made to the format of the management committee and both the chair and vice-chair show that there is a realistic recognition of current weaknesses and the need to bring about improvements. The initial action plan drawn up to address these weaknesses was very comprehensive, but its timescales for bringing about improvements were unrealistic and staff were not sufficiently involved in the process. The new acting headteacher has recognised this and a revised action plan is being developed with staff. The revised plan is a more realistic document.

Systems to bring about improvements to all aspects of the service's work, including the quality of teaching and learning, are recognised as being needed but, as yet, have not been developed. The accommodation on both sites is unsatisfactory, particularly so on the site for Year 9 and 10 students. This is having a very negative

impact on the work staff are trying to do with students. A comment in a recent consultant's report very accurately sums this up. 'The fabric of the building and disrepair of many of the fixtures and fittings underline the sense of failure apparent in many students.'

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

- develop a strategic direction and improvement plan based on the outcomes of rigorous self-evaluation – satisfactory
- implement management systems and procedures that enable senior leaders to monitor and evaluate all aspects of the service's work, especially the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress – inadequate.

External support

The PRU has received very active support from the local authority. As well as an officer taking temporary control until an experienced temporary headteacher could be appointed, other officers have provided good support in developing resources. The School Improvement Partner has provided valued training for staff and is assisting in the creation of a self-evaluation document. The local authority has noted the comments made in the evaluation of its action plan and made appropriate changes to increase the support it is providing.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of the accommodation available for the teaching and learning of students.
- Improve students' achievements, including the progress they make and their attendance.