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20 May 2008

Mrs Gillian Williams
The Headteacher
The ARC
Century Youth House
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Dear Mrs Williams

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE ALBERT ROAD CENTRE

Following my visit to your school on 13 and 14 May 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 December 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 Havering.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stuart Charlton
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF THE ALBERT ROAD CENTRE

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 13 - 14 May 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the work of the pupil referral unit (PRU), scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of students, the chair of the management group, the school improvement partner (SIP) and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the Section 5 inspection in December 2007, the deputy headteacher has resigned and the post has not yet been filled. This has left the PRU with only one permanent qualified teacher in addition to the headteacher. At present, the PRU's teaching commitments are being covered by agency staff and the turnover in personnel in the present term has been high.

Achievement and standards

The PRU has established secure systems to monitor students' achievements since the December 2007 inspection. These are based on a good range of assessments when students enter the PRU and regular tracking and monitoring of their progress on a termly basis. Rigorous and challenging targets are now set in all subjects and these provide an effective management tool against which the progress of individuals can be judged. However, because the PRU is at such an early stage in its development it does not have historical information against which to judge if the progress made by the present students is good enough. In addition, the very high staff turnover has meant that the challenging targets are not used consistently in teachers' planning to ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable. This year there has been an increase in the number of students entered for GCSE examinations and nationally recognised vocational qualifications compared with 2007. The standards which students are expected to obtain in these examinations indicate that the progress made by learners is improving. However, many can still do better because teaching and learning remain inconsistent and are not good enough.

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

- Improve students' achievement by setting them challenging targets and monitoring their progress – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The PRU has invested considerable time and effort into developing and implementing a behaviour policy linked to a rewards system which is much appreciated by students. This is applied consistently by staff and behaviour in lessons and around the PRU has improved significantly so that there is now more good behaviour compared with that at the time of the last inspection. Attendance is now rigorously monitored and attendance rates for many students have improved radically

compared with those in their previous schools. There is still a significant proportion of students who do not receive full-time tuition and this issue is presently being addressed through a review of admissions procedures across the authority. In addition, the PRU works very closely with the educational welfare service and makes every effort to try and re-engage those students who do not take up the opportunities offered to them. However, despite these initiatives, overall attendance rates are still not good enough. There are indications that the recent allocation of a team of full-time educational welfare officers (EWO), the use of Welfare Call and other strategies, are beginning to pay dividends.

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

- Improve students' attendance and monitor it more closely – satisfactory

Quality of provision

The very high staff turnover and the vacancies in the full-time staffing complement have meant that there has been little improvement in the overall quality of teaching and learning. The PRU has developed rigorous and robust systems to monitor classroom practice and these give a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses. However, too much time and effort is expended on inducting new staff and there is not enough continuity in personnel for these systems to have sufficient impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning. Through the intervention of the LA, the number of students on roll has reduced significantly since the December 2007 inspection, but the accommodation is still at its maximum capacity. No changes have been made to the building, nor are any in the planning stage, to address the judgement in the last inspection report that the accommodation was inadequate. This does not help to promote the self-esteem of students or staff. Good use is made of external providers, for example, Falltricks Hair and Beauty, to supplement and expand the curriculum. However, at present, the PRU does not have sufficient staffing capacity to monitor the effectiveness of this provision and has to rely on the providers to do this through their service level agreements with the LA. The PRU is now providing full-time education for the majority of its students, but there are still too many for whom this is not the case. A review is taking place across the authority to match its provision of alternative education more closely to the needs of learners.

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

- Provide full-time education for all students by providing adequate staffing, resources and accommodation to meet their needs – inadequate

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear view about how the PRU should develop. However, without the support of a senior management team and stability in the teaching establishment, she has not been able to secure the improvements which are needed to move forward. The monitoring and evaluation systems which have been put in place give a realistic view of the PRU's strengths and weaknesses. This view has not been taken up and acted upon by the management group because it has only met once since being radically revised following the December 2007 inspection.

Consequently, it has not acted as a critical friend by setting clear targets and criteria against which the effectiveness of the provision can be monitored and evaluated. The LA is currently reviewing its admissions procedures, particularly the roles and responsibilities of the Inclusion Panel. These have not been finalised and it is not yet clear that the PRU can make the appropriate provision for all who are placed there within the resources which are presently available. The lack of clarity about the management of the building means that procedures to safeguard students still do not meet government requirements.

There has been satisfactory improvement since the December 2007 inspection on issues which are within the direct control of the PRU. These include establishing systems to set challenging targets for students and monitor their progress, to monitor teaching and learning, and to promote attendance. These improvements have not been matched in other areas and consequently, the overall leadership and management has not demonstrated the necessary capacity to improve.

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

- Establish clear procedures for the admission of students – inadequate
- Ensure that procedures for safeguarding students meet government requirements – inadequate
- Establish clear targets against which to evaluate the work of the PRU – inadequate

External support

The LA has prepared a satisfactory statement of action. While dates are given for certain activities and good success criteria are provided, the timescales within which these should be achieved are not always clear. Consequently, on some issues from the December 2007 inspection, notably in regard to safeguarding and admissions policy, progress has been too slow. Good support has been provided by the SIP and external consultants and this has helped the PRU to move forward, but progress is still hampered by staffing issues which have not been resolved.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the accommodation and ensure that safeguarding procedures meet government requirements.
- Set clear and unambiguous targets against which the effectiveness of provision can be judged.
- Finalise and implement the arrangements for the admission of students.
- Stabilise the staffing situation and ensure that the quality of teaching and learning improves quickly.
- Ensure that staff use the challenging targets which are set for students to ensure that all make the progress of which they are capable.