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2 July 2008

Mrs H Yonwin
The Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Yonwin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LEARNING SUPPORT SERVICE

Following my visit with Mary Vallis, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19 June 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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 – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 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 second monitoring inspection: 19 June 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, staff on four of the sites, the local authority strategy manager, individual students and the chair of the management committee.

Context

The acting headteacher has continued in post and will remain until the end of the current term. A substantive headteacher has been appointed to start in September of this year. During the present term, a number of staff have been absent due to long-term sickness. A number of administration assistants have been appointed but have since left.

Achievement and standards

Overall students' achievement remains inadequate. Those students who attend the hospital schoolroom are making good progress because teachers plan their work rigorously based on good assessment of their skills. Permanently excluded students at the Year 9, 10 and 11 centres continue to make limited progress, partly because of their unsatisfactory attendance. There has been some improvement in achievement and there is evidence of increasingly higher expectations. For example, more than the usual number of students have taken, and are expected to pass, GCSE and Entry level examinations. Additionally, Year 9 students have taken national tests (SATs). Some students have also had the opportunity to gain awards for activities such as fishing and sailing.

Personal development and well-being

Individual support for students continues to give them good opportunities to discuss issues in their lives and students clearly appreciate this. This has a positive impact on the behaviour of a few, but there are still others who behave inappropriately and, as a result, temporary exclusions have been issued. Smoking continues to be a problem on the Year 9, 10 and 11 sites. A few students are gaining a better appreciation of healthy lifestyles through the support they receive and the availability, for example fruit for break times. Those students who take part in the afternoon enrichment sessions benefit from participating in physical activities such as swimming and sailing. The limited curriculum and students' continuing poor attendance mean that their preparation for future economic well-being is very limited. A few, though, have started to benefit from work experience placements. Both the Youth Offending Team and Connexions are fully involved in supporting those students who are receptive to their approaches.

Quality of provision

The acting headteacher has a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This includes monitoring teachers' lesson planning and feeding back points for improvement. Some teachers have been observed and teaching and review meetings have usefully identified strengths and areas to develop. Teachers appreciate this support and believe it is starting to have a positive effect on their work. However, the absence of some permanent staff due to long term sickness is affecting the impact of these improvements on students' progress. Although teachers have begun to assess students' attainment in core subjects, it is only at the hospital school that these assessments are being used effectively to plan work that challenges students.

The curriculum is still unsatisfactory, especially for Year 10 and 11 students. The curriculum as a whole is unsuccessful in engaging students and encouraging them to be interested in learning. Although all students follow mathematics and English courses, staff absence has prevented science being taught at the Year 9 and 10 centre. The afternoon curriculum is being developed and has had a positive impact on a few pupils. For example, two previously disaffected students are eagerly completing projects in woodwork. Overall, though, the curriculum is limited and for Year 10 and 11 students there are few vocational activities.

There has been satisfactory progress in addressing weaknesses in the safeguarding of students. Risk assessments have been undertaken and profiles of students drawn up, but when students first join the PRU not all staff are made fully aware of their difficulties. Although the development of challenging targets within individual education plans is part of the PRU's development plan, little progress has been made in ensuring that this is happening on all sites. Links with outside agencies are being developed and the acting headteacher has identified the need to increase the use of 'therapy services' to support the needs of students.

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

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

Leadership and management

Staff and the management committee acknowledge the positive impact the acting headteacher has had on the quality of the PRU's work. She has been instrumental in involving staff in evaluating the PRU's effectiveness and identifying the areas in need of development. This is resulting in a clear plan for bringing about improvements. The monitoring of teaching and learning is giving the senior staff evidence of strengths and areas for development, although it is too early to see what impact this is having on students' progress.

The management committee, well led by its chair, is developing its role well and clearly has a good understanding of the need for improvements in the work of the

PRU. Plans have been put forward with the long term aim of establishing the PRU as an effective resource for all secondary schools. These plans involve moving to new premises which is very appropriate as the current premises continue to be unsatisfactory. Planning also rightly includes the discontinued use of the Dolphin Centre, where pupils are currently being taught individually or in small groups in the library, alongside the general public.

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 – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has been very active in supporting both the acting headteacher and the management committee. This has resulted in a clear plan for the redevelopment of the PRU. Good support has been provided by specialist advisers but again staff absence is limiting the impact of this. The School Improvement Partner continues to provide the acting headteacher with much appreciated support.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 is more varied and relevant and is more effective in engaging them in learning.