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3 October 2008

Mr S Whittingham
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Whittingham

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your pupil referral unit (PRU) on 2 October 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the senior staff who I met with, the chair of the management committee, and the students who talked to me about their work and life at the PRU. Although I was able to visit all three sites and discuss progress with senior staff, due to time limitations, I was unable to observe any teaching at the Millgate and Short Stay School sites.

Since the last inspection the PRU has reorganised its provision. At the short stay school site the 'Specialist Learning Assessment Centre' has been set up since the start of September which is now taking pupils who are at imminent risk of permanent exclusion. This strategic change aims to support the local authority's move towards the target of zero permanent exclusion in all city schools. As a result of setting up the assessment centre students at the Individual Learning Centre (ILC), who have in the past been permanently excluded, present some of the most challenging learning difficulties and disabilities. Another key factor in the changes of provision is a reduction in numbers at the ILC which has meant that the PRU now has the space to provide 25 hours of education for all students.

At the time of this monitoring inspection there were two members of staff absent due to illness. The previous inspection highlighted the fact the PRU had no subject leaders for English and mathematics and this remains the case hindering the progress the PRU is making.

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 4 and 5 March 2008, the PRU was asked to:

- improve assessment procedures so that teachers can better match work to students' abilities
- evaluate the causes of poor attendance and take effective action to address these
- ensure that all students receive the full education provision to which they are entitled
- make better use of information on students' progress to set more challenging targets so that the best possible progress can be made.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress.

Assessment procedures continue to develop at the ILC centre and senior staff are building up a detailed student progress tracking system. The assessment data collected is highlighting where there are weaknesses in relation to specific subject areas or teaching. A more rigorous approach to monitoring teachers' planning, students' work and observations of teaching has also provided the senior management team with clear evidence of where improvements are taking place and where work is being better matched to students' abilities. However, improvements are much more evident at the ILC and assessment procedures for the new assessment centre provision are at very early stages. Furthermore, there has been no formal lesson observations, scrutiny of students' work or teachers' planning in relation to the assessment centre provision which leaves the PRU unable to evaluate this area of new provision. At Millgate Lodge assessment is not sharply focused on academic achievement.

There has been a good analysis of the causes of poor attendance. When taking the overall attendance figures of the PRU there is a slight improving trend. This is especially so for those students who are placed on vocational courses. There is also evidence that the new assessment centre provision is having a positive impact on attendance. Attendance at the ILC stubbornly remains a cause for concern. A change of time for the start of the school day, a breakfast club, mentoring programmes, and targets for attendance have all had minimal impact on ILC students. Further action has been planned.

The PRU has been successful in reorganising its provision to ensure all students have access to 25 hours of education. Increasingly the PRU is matching the curriculum and setting to the needs of students which is engaging students more in learning and resulting in their attendance improving. For a number of students, especially those at the ILC, readjusting to an extended 25 hour week has been difficult. The PRU has yet to instil enough student enthusiasm in what is on offer so that their attendance improves.

The management committee now sets targets related to student progress and attainment. Provisional test and exam results at the end of the 2008 summer term indicated some progress. Academic targets in class are in use but vary in how effectively they are impacting on the rate of progress students making. In discussion

with students it was evident that some were aware of their targets but were not always able to explain them. Examples of targets being referred to in planning were seen but, because teachers made no mention of them in lessons, opportunities were missed to remind students of any expectations of their academic progress.

The impact of the local authority's support and challenge as outlined in their statement of action is satisfactory. The role of the PRU as part of the local authority's provision for students at risk of permanent exclusion is heavily influencing developments and at times appears to outweigh the focus on dealing with the notice to improve. For example, the focus on students' academic achievement does not appear to have been discussed in any depth at the last management committee meeting. The School Improvement Partner's (SIP) report, updated in August 2008, is detailed and evaluative. The SIP identified a range of issues and judged that overall provision and outcomes for students, at that time, was inadequate. These judgements are both robust and realistic and highlight the improvement still needed.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Cook". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Her Majesty's Inspector