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Protect inspection

14 November 2008

Ms Jo Perry
The Headteacher
Learning Support Service
Broadstone Youth Centre
Moor Road
Poole
Dorset
BH18 8AZ

Dear Ms Perry

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Learning Support Service

Following my visit to your school on 10 and 11 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 third monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 November 2008

Evidence

The inspector visited the two centres used for educating students in Years 9, 10 and 11, who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, other staff, officers from the local authority, individual students and the chair of the management committee.

Context

A new headteacher took up her post at the start of the present term, September 2008. Staff sickness continues to present difficulties and currently a number of staff working at both centres are temporary supply teachers. The difficulties with recruiting permanent administration support continue, although the headteacher reports this should be resolved in the near future.

Achievement and standards

Improvements are steadily being made to the achievements of students who attend the centres. This year more students passed GCSE and Entry Level examinations than in the previous year. Four students also completed the Key Stage 3 national assessments at the end of Year 9. Students are now making at least satisfactory progress through achieving challenging weekly targets. Many have achieved over 75% of these so far this term. Improvements to the curriculum are also beginning to give students the opportunity to achieve in other aspects, such as the bronze award in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network.

Personal development and well-being

Most students have made good improvement to their attendance during the current term. Records and observations also demonstrate that the behaviour of students is improving and this has resulted in a big reduction in the number of temporary exclusions issued by the centres. Improvements in behaviour have allowed the students to enjoy taking part in an extended range of activities during the afternoons. Students are also improving their understanding of living healthily. They appreciate the opportunity to have fruit at breaks and many take part in recreational activities, such as table tennis and visits to a local gym. This term the school has banned smoking. This has presented difficulties for some students, but the majority are now accepting this and remain in school without leaving to smoke as was the case previously. The PRU is supporting those students who are finding it difficult to stop smoking through specialist health advisors, who provide nicotine substitutes

when necessary. Students are now also able to make a positive contribution to the running of the PRU through participating in the school council. Their economic well-being is also being well supported by an increase in a number of placements available for work experience.

Quality of provision

There are substantial improvements in the quality of provision at the two centres visited. The most significant of these are improvements in the accommodation. Whilst both centres still have their significant limitations, both now have teaching areas that have the feel of being learning environments. The general condition of the buildings and furniture are of a higher standard and good displays of students' work are on view. Funding has been secured for new accommodation and a new building has been identified.

There has been significant improvement in the planning of lessons. The new headteacher has conducted an audit of the lesson plans of all teachers and provided constructive observations on how they could be more effective. Teachers have responded well to these and a recent second audit is providing evidence that they have a greater understanding of the need to plan lessons based on the information they have about the students' ability and their previous achievements. Staff absences continue to have an impact and slow the rate of improvement that is being made in this area. Staff continue to have good relationships with students and they use these positively to engage and encourage students in their learning.

The curriculum is now satisfactory. This is because of a number of short-term changes have been made to ensure that students have a wider range of learning opportunities. Staff work very effectively with outside professionals, such as those from the youth service and Connexions, to seek to provide students with lessons and activities that interest them. Creative approaches have been made to extend the curriculum further through joint bids with a mainstream school for places on accredited courses for both building and catering. Other positive improvements include the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network being added to the timetable and an increased emphasis placed on personal, health and social education and citizenship. This is being supported by an application for a Healthy School award.

Good systems and procedures to support both students' academic and personal development are being introduced. An induction package is being established and nationally recognised assessment packages used. Daily tutorials take place to set and remind students about their targets and weekly reports are sent home to parents. These are well supported by half termly reports and a review meeting at the centres when parents and carers are invited to accompany their children to review their progress and the targets being set for their achievements. These are very positive developments and are ensuring that the centres have a much greater

understanding of the progress and the specific needs of each student. Very relevant improvement has been made in dealing with students with difficult behaviour by creating positive handling plans for them. These are detailed and show how support will be provided. Staff, though, do require up-to-date training to allow them to use all the strategies proposed.

Improvements have been made to safeguarding arrangements but they still do not fully comply with requirements. The headteacher has alerted the local authority and plans are in hand to address the shortcomings immediately.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

There has been a remarkable positive transformation in the impact of leadership and management on the work of the PRU. The new headteacher has ensured that there has been a rigorous evaluation of the PRU's strengths and weaknesses. As a result of this, a good improvement plan has been established which includes the need for a re-structuring of the staffing. The plan includes very effective short-term improvements that were needed to ensure that current students are not disadvantaged and a clear long-term strategic plan for how the provision will be developed even further. The headteacher and management committee now have a clear vision of the PRU's role within the local authority's range of provision to support students experiencing difficulties in mainstream education. The PRU has a much better understanding of the need to support students to return to mainstream education, or in providing an alternative curriculum that prepares them for leaving school and moving either into further education or employment. Recent changes have led to a very visible increase in the expectations of staff, which is beginning to result in improved teaching and learning and students making better progress.

The management committee continues to provide the PRU with considerable support. The chair, in particular, has proved to be invaluable in the support he has offered to the new headteacher.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- develop a strategic direction and improvement plan based on the outcomes of rigorous self-evaluation – outstanding
- 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 – good.

External support

The local authority officers continue to support the PRU well, particularly in giving the headteacher the scope to prioritise developments and in providing the PRU with short term solutions to curriculum and care weaknesses. They have, though, been slow to respond to the headteacher's request to ensure safeguarding documentation fully complies with regulations.