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13 March 2009

Mr G Caldwell
The Headteacher
Burton Learning Centre
Berryhedge Lane
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Staffordshire
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Dear Mr Caldwell

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Burton Learning Centre

Following my visit with Mark Emly, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 March 2009, 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 June 2008. 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.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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 Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Burton Learning Centre

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the coordinators of special educational needs provision, personal, social and health education (PSHE), and work experience, the community support officer who works with the PRU, the chair of the management committee, and two representatives from the local authority. Informal discussions were held with pupils at the Winshill and the Waterloo Street sites.

Context

Since the previous visit, four staff have joined the PRU. These appointments comprise an assistant headteacher with responsibility for the Waterloo Street site, two inclusion managers and an administrative assistant. One member of staff has left.

Following the previous monitoring inspection the temporary base at Uttoxeter was closed. A new facility at Uttoxeter has been acquired but this is not yet in use. Uttoxeter pupils are working at one of the two other sites and using local facilities with the staff.

Currently the PRU has 35 pupils on roll full time and 22 dual registered pupils who attend their mainstream school for part of the week.

Achievement and standards

Lesson observations, an examination of pupils' work, and the PRU's own assessment information indicate that an increased proportion of the PRU's pupils are making at least satisfactory progress across the curriculum. Of the core subjects, recent progress is strongest in English and science but is also improving rapidly in mathematics. Pupils' progress in personal, social and emotional development is at least satisfactory and for a growing number of pupils it is good.

In lessons, pupils' progress was at least satisfactory and sometimes good. The standard of the work of the pupils based at the Waterloo Street site has improved since the previous inspection, and their progress has accelerated accordingly. For these pupils, improved progress is particularly marked in mathematics but is evident across the curriculum. This is due to a transformed learning environment, far higher expectations, and a better quality of teaching than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils have responded positively to these changes and are putting considerable effort into their work. The progress of pupils based at Winshill and Uttoxeter has also accelerated. The pupils who have a statement of special



educational needs are making better progress because of the improved attention being paid to their specific requirements. The progress made by the small number of pupils who attend full-time courses with an alternative provider is slow because courses are not well tailored to their needs. A few pupils' progress is hampered by their low attendance, but this number has decreased since the previous inspection. Several pupils are making good or outstanding progress with their work experience placements, developing a range of academic and personal skills and being offered opportunities for future work or training.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the achievement of all pupils especially those with a statement of special educational needs – good.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour during the inspection were good. Pupils clearly recognised the significance of the inspection and were keen to support the staff and to demonstrate the centres at their best. Pupils were willing to discuss their experiences at the PRU and were positive about the progress they have made.

Attendance has improved. An increasing number of pupils regularly have weeks where their attendance is 100%. Previous issues with monitoring and calculating attendance have been solved. Systems are now rigorous and accurate and give a clear and instant picture of each pupil's attendance. A small, but decreasing, number of pupils' attendance remains inadequate. The deputy headteacher works in close partnership with the education welfare officer to take appropriate action where a pupil's attendance is too low or when it decreases, and this is largely effective. The greatly enhanced provision is having a significant impact on pupils' motivation to attend.

The PRU leaders have placed a strong emphasis on raising pupils' aspirations. During the inspection, a number of references were made by staff and by pupils to the next steps pupils want to take. Several pupils have applied to join the army, one pupil has secured a college place to take an A Level standard nursing course, others have secured jobs or apprenticeships, and others are keen to study further. This approach is having a significant impact on developing pupils' confidence and their motivation to improve their skills and gain qualifications. A wide range of off-site activities make a strong contribution to pupils' social, emotional and behavioural skills.

Pupils are increasingly making a positive contribution to the centres. Pupils took an active part in planning and implementing the changes at the Waterloo Street site and have responsibilities to maintain the new orderly environment. In the recent round of staff appointments, pupils were involved in interviewing staff and conveying their views to the headteacher. Healthy lunches are now served at the Waterloo Street and Winshill sites.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve pupils' attendance – good.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory overall. Several lessons were good and one was outstanding. Strengths evident in all lessons were the good relationship between staff and pupils, the clear focus on learning, and the effective management of pupils' behaviour. Strategies to involve pupils in assessing their own learning are new, but are being developed well. In one good lesson, pupils were asked to review their learning using a well-designed prompt sheet which refocused them on their long term targets as well as the targets for that lesson. In an outstanding lesson, pupils were asked to consider what they were aiming to achieve during the forthcoming climbing session and to record this in order to be able to reflect on it at the end of the session. In most lessons, there was some tendency for staff to not to give pupils sufficient time or encouragement to reflect on a question or to articulate their thinking, resulting in pupils being too passive. Marking has started to improve, although there is some way to go before it fully informs pupils what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Target setting is more rigorous and is starting to be used more effectively in lessons.

The improvement in the curriculum is good. The 'Pathways' approach has enabled all pupils to receive a tailored package to meet their needs. This is further personalised by a well-run work experience programme and a range of courses run by external providers both on or off site, including photography, motor mechanics, music composition, and brick laying. Plans for the start of the new academic year in September 2009 are well thought out and will further refine the curriculum on offer. There is a clear rationale for the different curricula offered to the full time and the dual registered pupils. While provision for the dual registered pupils sensibly concentrates on developing pupils' personal, social and emotional skills, for full time pupils the emphasis is on gaining a range of academic qualifications as well as personal development. Good progress has been made in developing the personal, social and health education curriculum and the sex and relationships education curriculum. The curriculum for pupils with statements of special educational needs is now more suitable and more tailored to their individual requirements. Appropriate work has begun to improve the curriculum for pupils who receive home tuition. The PRU has developed positive relationships with an appropriately wide range of support agencies.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all groups, especially pupils with a statement of special educational needs, and that all pupils receive their full entitlement to personal, social, citizenship and health education – good.



Leadership and management

The headteacher, ably assisted by the deputy headteacher, has continued his well focused and effective drive for improvement. These leaders have a very clear vision, which is articulated well both verbally and in a clear action plan. Since January, a new and appropriate staffing structure has been in place. This is already having a positive impact on the PRU's capacity to improve, as is the increasing responsibility staff are taking for leading areas of development. Teamwork is evolving well – established staff are re-energised by the PRU's new direction and new staff have settled in quickly. Staff now understand their responsibilities and the new expectations and there is a far higher level of consistency both in classrooms and in the PRU as a whole. Movement of staff between sites has led to a shared ethos. Careful attention has been paid to staff's continuing professional development, which is having a positive impact on their skills. These developments have had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, attitudes and learning. Good links with parents and carers have been established and their views of their children's education at the PRU are positive. Almost all the necessary changes have been made and it is crucial that the PRU now embeds and develops them to ensure a high level of consistency, stability and capacity.

The chair of the management committee has a very clear understanding of his role and is providing a good level of support and challenge to the headteacher. He visits the PRU regularly. The management committee comprises an appropriate range of members, who are well informed about the PRU's strengths and areas for development, and are therefore able to ask appropriate questions as well as to celebrate success. The relationship between the PRU and local headteachers is developing well.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- put in a place a management committee that can provide effective strategic planning, and which rigorously monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the senior leadership team and quality of the PRU's provision - good

External support

Local authority support has been satisfactory overall. Annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs have now been carried out. No protocol exists for placing pupils in the PRU and this does, at times, hamper the smooth admission of pupils. Exit strategies for permanently excluded pupils are not well defined. Good support has been provided by the education welfare service and the school improvement team. The link adviser has a good knowledge of the PRU and provides a suitably rigorous level of challenge coupled with valuable support. Subject advisers have provided appropriate support as required.

Priorities for further improvement

With the support of the local authority and in partnership with local secondary schools:

- ensure that admission forms contain all required information about the pupils and include a clear exit strategy
- develop a clear rationale and a set of protocols for the placement of dual registered pupils at the PRU.

Enable pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning by:

- developing the assessment for learning strategies which have begun to be used
- making good use of pupils' individual learning targets
- giving pupils a range of strategies and opportunities to encourage them to contribute verbally to lessons.