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Mr A Young
Unit manager
Maidstone and Malling Alternative Curriculum Pupil Referral Unit
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Dear Mr Young

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your pupil referral unit (PRU) on 23 October 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to local authority officers who met with me at short notice and to staff at each of the three centres for their welcome.

The PRU continues to use the same three commissioned providers that it was using when it was last inspected and all of them are full, just as they were then. One centre manager has changed, at UP2U. Other changes have seen the appointment of experienced management committee members and the election of a chair.

As a result of the inspection on 21 January 2009, the PRU was asked to:

- introduce formal systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the PRU which involve all leaders, including the management committee, and that establish challenging and measurable targets for improving students' achievement
- implement systematic procedures to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning in improving students' progress in all centres
- ensure all staff make consistent use of information about students' progress to set individual academic targets which show students clearly how they can improve their learning and that are reviewed with them regularly.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the PRU is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The local authority's rapid response to the findings of the inspection report is primarily responsible for this good rate of progress. Improvement strategies were drawn up quickly. An action plan provided a good framework for change and the local authority was instrumental in driving forward the developments required. It



initiated monitoring by senior officers, staff from the behaviour and attendance and advisory services, and the school improvement partner. Regular review meetings between local authority staff and routine evaluation meetings with managers from commissioned services maintained the momentum of change. By maintaining a high profile and by taking a lead role, the local authority was very influential in ensuring that all managers understood their role in maintaining high standards through focused and evaluative monitoring.

The management committee and the unit manager ensured that the local authority's plans and aspirations had impact. Decisions to appoint the local children's services partnership manager as chair of the management committee and subsequent key appointments to the committee were critical. The much strengthened committee maintain a very good oversight of the measures that the local authority implemented through a planned programme of monitoring visits. First, these measures aimed to establish a clear understanding of relative strengths and weaknesses, such as the quality of teaching and learning at the different centres. Then they focused on improving provision, such as providing training on effective lesson planning and the skills of lesson observation. The management committee now carries out its twin roles of support and challenge well. The committee did much to empower the unit manager to become more effective. The inspection report commented that he had identified key priority areas for development, even though he had been in post for only three weeks. The committee built on this early sign of his capacity to initiate and sustain change. He uses planned and unannounced visits to all centres well to monitor staff and to evaluate their effectiveness. This includes conducting lesson observations jointly with local authority staff and sometimes alongside managers from the commissioned providers. The outcome is more effective teaching, which is beginning to accelerate students' rate of learning.

An action plan calendar and a unit development plan provide a context within which monitoring takes place. Targets are set and progress towards them is measured as managers and leaders in all capacities develop clearer understanding of their responsibilities. However, despite monitoring procedures becoming more robust and increasingly embedded, there has not been sufficient time for them to have had full impact in improving academic outcomes for students. Systems have developed staff's appreciation of how to accelerate students' pace of learning through more effective academic support and guidance but inconsistent practice remains. There has been satisfactory development of staff's use of assessment information to enable students to build systematically on their prior learning.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your PRU. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell
Additional Inspector

