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Ms M Bent
The Headteacher
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Dear Ms Bent

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your pupil referral unit on 6 October 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the students and to the local authority's attached adviser for finding the time to talk with me.

There are 30% more students on roll compared with the previous inspection as a result of a sudden increase in the number of permanent exclusions at the end of the summer term. Virtually all students are in Years 10 and 11. The senior management team has also undergone change. A teacher has been promoted to take on responsibility for developing the alternative curriculum, and the deputy headteacher has been appointed permanently to the post after a period of doing the job in an acting capacity. A special educational needs coordinator was also appointed with effect from September 2009 but an accident has prevented her taking up post.

As a result of the inspection on 20 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- make every effort to recruit suitable staff to fill long-standing vacancies
- use assessment more effectively to set precise targets for individual students' personal development and academic achievement
- gather and analyse all data to evaluate the unit's effectiveness more rigorously

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Examination results in 2009 show that students performed better than in previous years. Just over 44% achieved five or more GCSEs A* to G or their equivalent, which represents an increase of 7% on 2008. This compares very favourably with the figure for pupil referral units nationally, as does the proportion (100%) who



achieved one or more GCSEs A* to G. The introduction of eight BTEC vocational courses in 2008 was a major innovation in enthusing students and encouraging them to complete their courses. Students make satisfactory progress during their time in the unit. The standard of work of a few students is broadly in line with expectations for their age, but most are working at a lower level.

The local authority has provided a high level of effective support since the previous inspection. The attached adviser, School Improvement Partner and assigned consultant have worked together well to help the unit address the key areas for development. They have had a particular impact on helping it to remedy the acute staffing problem that was highlighted in the previous inspection report. By developing recruitment strategies and becoming involved in the interview process, the authority has helped the school to appoint staff with expertise in different subjects. Only one vacancy currently exists and it is hoped to fill that very shortly.

Collaborative working has also contributed much to the development of procedures for assessing students' personal and academic achievements, setting targets and tracking progress. These procedures are becoming embedded but they have not been in place long enough to show improvements over a long period. Their management is the special educational needs coordinator's responsibility once she recovers, but the early signs are that they will be important indicators of academic and personal achievement. This improvement in assessment information use is part of a bigger development in data collection and analysis. It enables managers to determine priorities on the basis of evidence, but at this stage of development the unit is not identifying the few most important areas for improvement. Development plans identify too many targets. This deflects attention away from the few critical actions that will have the most impact, which limits the rate at which leaders can demonstrate a high sustainable capacity for continuing improvement.

Despite being almost fully staffed and having more useful assessment information, the unit has not built on last year's success. Learning is now inadequate in some instances. About 72% of the students are new this term and most of the new staff are inexperienced at working with students with very challenging behaviours. The inevitable consequence, a few weeks into term, is that students have found their feet and are testing the boundaries. Staff do not have the strategies to manage these behaviours. Too many instances of unacceptable behaviour, such as aggression and swearing, pass without staff comment or intervention and low level disruptions frequently disturb learning. There is no consistency of approach and the headteacher's monitoring has recognised this. However, the training programme that will clarify the behaviour management strategy and give the staff the skills that they need to apply it consistently has not yet been delivered.

Although there has been satisfactory progress against the key development areas, I am not confident that students' behaviours are being managed sufficiently well by all staff. This leads to concerns about their rate of learning and the possibility that the situation can deteriorate. Therefore, I am recommending that inspectors make a second monitoring visit before the next section 5 inspection.



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

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell
Additional Inspector

