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Mrs Sarah Briton  
Head of Centre  
Northfields Education Centre  
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Dear Mrs Briton

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your centre on 11 November 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information that you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to staff, parents, the school improvement partner and to the pupils for their time and courtesy.

Since the last inspection the centre has undergone significant changes. The head of the centre and the deputy, who was the designated teacher, both left. Following a secondment position you were appointed in July 2009 as the new head of the centre. Hospital teaching is now part of the centre's provision. The centre also moved to a new building in May 2009 to improve facilities and enhance the quality of the learning environment.

As a result of the inspection on 23 October 2008, the centre was asked to:

- make sure that all pupils receive a sufficient number of teaching hours
- increase the breadth of the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all the pupils
- ensure that teachers match activities effectively to the capabilities and needs of the pupils.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the centre has made:

satisfactory progress in making improvements

*and*



satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The minimum entitlement for pupils unable for medical reasons to attend the centre is met. However, this is a minimum and should be increased where possible to enable pupils to keep up with their studies. This is particularly important when pupils are approaching public examinations. It is reported by the centre that over half the pupils could sustain more teaching hours. This area has not been effectively tackled since the last inspection. The centre needs to work further with the local authority in order to enable pupils to receive as much education as their medical condition allows.

The profile of current staffing is fragile. You are the only full-time and permanent member of staff. It is anticipated that further permanent appointments will be made before the end of the year. Regardless, this will not provide the centre with the capacity to increase its teaching time as best practice and DCSF guidance would indicate (Guidance for Local Authorities and schools: Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision; section 4.8). This lack of teaching capacity acts as a significant barrier to the amount of teaching time to enable pupils to meet their needs and fulfil their capabilities. The consequence is that it severely limits the capacity for the centre to improve and raise outcomes for pupils.

The curriculum has been extended and enriched to include a wider range of experiences for pupils, including educational trips and physical education. During the monitoring visit, pupils were making 'bags for life', pizza and preparing for a science examination. These pupils were making good progress, were well taught and undertaking activities that effectively matched their needs and capabilities. Progress in these two areas of development for those pupils taught in the centre base is good.

The centre has yet to update its self-evaluation of its effectiveness. This reflects the instability of staffing and the movement of the centre to a new base. You have correctly identified the areas for improvement and have instigated plans and systems to address them. Your determination to bring about improvements in teaching and learning is impressive. It will take time for there to be clear evidence of improvement in provision and outcomes. The centre must now strengthen its processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and act to strengthen teaching, including extending the available teaching time to ensure that pupils make sufficiently good progress. The centre must rigorously monitor the provision and outcomes for pupils who are taught as part of outreach work and/or the hospital unit.

There is a clear commitment from the local authority to support you in your new role. Staff morale is high. Successful partnerships with other education providers and the teacher in the hospital unit are developing and you are aware that where these are strongest pupils make better progress and their achievements are higher.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny  
Her Majesty's Inspector