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Mr Tony Cooper
The Centre School
The Centre
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Dear Mr Cooper

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Centre School

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 June 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed subject to the following qualification: mentoring is undertaken by successful teachers from the federated mainstream school.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of The Centre School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on Wednesday 9 June and Thursday 10 June 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the head of centre, external leadership consultant, groups of students, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

An external consultant has been contracted for two days per week to add capacity to the leadership team. Two teaching staff have left and one new teacher has joined the school since the last inspection. Additional administration and a welfare coordinator have been put in place since the last inspection. At no time during the inspection were all students on the school roll present at the school site and for most of the time there were only about half present, As well as absences, Year 11 were on study leave and some other students were working at other sites.

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Students make at least satisfactory progress in most lessons because there are clear expectations about learning. New baseline and tracking data for students in Years 7 to 10 enables teachers to have a better knowledge of the students' levels of understanding in literacy, numeracy and science; as a result, lesson planning and additional help is better matched to meet the students' needs. There are still some lessons where expectations of achievement are not high enough and work is not adjusted sufficiently to match the students' differing abilities. At times, progress is also reduced because the support students receive focuses on completing the task and not what is being learnt through the process. Individual targets for students are in place and give reasonable levels of challenge. School tracking demonstrates that the majority of students are on track for reaching their targets by the end of the year. There is a developing range of additional support targeted at specific students who are experiencing more difficulties and this is helping to accelerate progress, for example, one to one support for reading, writing and spelling. The daily basic skills sessions are also providing a useful framework for ensuring students practise literacy and numeracy skills but medium- and long-term planning is not sufficiently robust to maximise the potential of these sessions. Some students attend very regularly but too many students do not attend frequently enough to secure good enough progress over time.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Raise achievement and strengthen learning and progress – good.



Other relevant pupil outcomes

The majority of students say they are learning more and behaviour has improved. Expectations about behaviour are clearer than during the last inspection. Behaviour observed, especially in lessons, was usually calm and most students had a reasonable attitude to their work. The review of behaviour and attitudes at the end of lessons is helping improve consistency, especially when students are fully involved. Students are motivated by the rewards system. There are a few students who remove themselves from lessons too frequently but this does not disrupt the learning of others. Support staff check the whereabouts of any of these students. Less structured times during the day are more volatile and the unstructured end of the day is difficult for some students. Good systems for tracking behaviour have been established and this is providing better information for the school to evaluate progress in this area. Serious incidents and those requiring exclusion or physical intervention have reduced following a rise a few months after the last inspection. There are more opportunities for some students to be involved in decision making through the 'Student Voice'.

Attendance remains too low, although there have been some individual improvements as a result of intervention programmes from the school and the education welfare service. Analysis of missed sessions is not used to inform lesson planning.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Manage students' behaviour in the classroom in order that they can learn effectively – good.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Lesson planning is stronger and is more carefully aligned to a sequence of learning. Expectations about the progress students can make has improved, nevertheless there are some staff who do not offer sufficient academic challenge. Teachers use a range of interesting activities within each lesson that are better matched to imparting new knowledge, developing new skills or practising and applying previous learning. In the vast majority of lessons observed, students were clear about what they were learning and what they needed to improve upon. Some teachers planned good techniques for assessing understanding during and at the end of a lesson but not all staff carried this out effectively. In a few lessons there was an over reliance on extra support to help students complete work rather than work being more finely adjusted to differing needs. Teachers' subject knowledge is usually sound but planning, particularly of the afternoon sessions, remains too variable in quality.



Improvements in curriculum planning and the timetable design within this school year have been good and the plans for the new academic year are appropriate to ensure a better balance of learning than at the last inspection. There is a better focus on teaching the necessary skills to ensure all students gain literacy and numeracy skills suitable for their futures. Improvements in the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) have begun. Schemes of work, developed with the support of subject specialists from the federated mainstream school, as well as external support, ensure there is greater clarity about progression for students with different levels of ability. Accreditation opportunities have been extended and are beginning to offer a wider range of opportunities for students to celebrate achievement. Planning for the afternoon sessions has improved, although it is very variable. The links between lessons at the school and other activities are not explicit enough. Individual targets for students are now clearer but are not always being monitored across the curriculum, especially during activity sessions.

The accommodation at the school is inadequate for the number of pupil places. The school manages this reasonably well by accessing the federated mainstream school buildings and alternative sites, but it remains a constraint on the curriculum and how behaviour can be managed.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Strengthen lesson and eliminate inadequate teaching – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The head of centre and executive headteacher have made good progress in establishing higher expectations for students' achievement and behaviour. However, some staff and governors are not as confident as others about raising expectations of achievement and behaviour for students with identified special educational needs. Teachers remaining at the school have, on the whole, risen to the challenge and improvements in learning are evident particularly in morning lessons. The curriculum developments are helping to improve equality of opportunity.

The temporary leadership structure has been supportive in establishing good progress in the necessary areas for development and there are plans to keep the current levels of support in place. Additional administration time and close work between external support and staff at the school are helping to build a more sustainable structure.

Regular monitoring and evaluation has established an accurate picture of the quality of provision offered to the students. Many changes have been implemented and outcomes for the students have begun to improve. Governors have a clearer view about the school. Meeting minutes suggest a growing awareness of the need to challenge the school. The action and improvement plans are useful and successes are becoming evident. However, because of the previous lack of baseline information



the success criteria are too vague to provide a robust indicator of the speed of improvements.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Strengthen leadership and management – good.
- Increase equality of opportunity – good.

External support

The impact of external support brokered by the local authority and that provided by the federated mainstream school has been good. There has been a close match of support to the necessary priorities for development and the local authority action plan has provided a useful framework for this, although success criteria lack the benefit of a robust baseline. There has been improved training for staff, helping to create greater consistency in behaviour management, lesson planning and assessment. Regular weekly input has also helped to establish the necessary systems for tracking and evaluating students' progress, behaviour and attendance. The systems are robust and are beginning to be used regularly to assist evaluation. Similarly, the school improvement partner provides an ongoing and detailed external view of quality and improvement, helping the school to build on success as well as being alert to less successful changes.

Priorities for further improvement

- Assist self evaluation by using new baseline information to establish more rigorous and objective success criteria.