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29 April 2010

Mr W Carpenter  
Executive headteacher  
Ashdale Pupil Referral Unit  
Marton Road  
Middlesborough  
Teeside  
TS4 3RX

Dear Mr Carpenter

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ashdale Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Following my visit to your school on 28 April 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 Ashdale became subject to special measures in December 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed

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 Middlesborough local authority.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson  
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Ashdale Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 28 April 2010

## Evidence

The inspector observed the work of the PRU, scrutinised documents and met with the new executive headteacher, external consultants, a group of teaching and support staff, administrative staff, the chair of the management committee and representatives from Middlesbrough local authority.

## Context

The Ashdale centre supports students from Year 10 and Year 11 with a wide range of social, behavioural and emotional difficulties, many of whom have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. The majority of students are boys and many transfer to Ashdale having spent time in the local Key Stage 3 PRU. The teacher-in-charge of Ashdale has been absent on sick leave since the time of the previous inspection. A temporary teacher-in-charge was put in place by the local authority between December 2009 and April 2010. A new executive headteacher started work in the school on 19 April. He has also been given responsibility for the leadership of the Key Stage 3 PRU. External consultants were appointed by the local authority to support the school in March; they continue to work with the new executive headteacher.

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

Many students have a history of low rates of attendance and poor attitudes to learning, as a result, educational standards are well below average. In the lessons observed, although standards remain low, there was a much calmer and less disruptive atmosphere than reported at the time of the last inspection. Students are well supported by highly effective pastoral support. The improved behaviour makes better learning possible in lessons. However, many students still do not make the progress of which they are capable and many students do not enjoy their learning. Students lack confidence when answering questions and working in groups. Despite this, too many activities in lessons are taught as whole-group exercises. Little use is made of individual assessment to personalise learning to match the needs of students. Very limited analysis has taken place of the academic progress students make in Year 10. Analysis of progress in Year 11 is partial, but indicates that a significant number of students made insufficient progress in English, mathematics and science between January and April 2010. In particular, students who are looked after by the local authority and those with a statement of special educational needs make inadequate progress. In the main, this is due to their very poor attendance.



The executive headteacher has quickly identified a range of suitable measures to begin to focus on these weaknesses and those identified in the previous inspection.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve students' learning and progress – inadequate

Other relevant outcomes

Students' behaviour during the monitoring visit was calm and controlled. Staff demonstrated great skill in defusing potentially difficult situations before they escalated. Students got on well with each other in lessons and around the centre. A monitoring system used at the end of each lesson focuses on evaluating students' behaviour and provides a useful reminder of the expectations of staff. The number of fixed-term exclusions has halved since the last inspection and exclusion is now used as a final sanction rather than an everyday occurrence.

Attendance at Ashdale has improved since the last inspection. Attendance is monitored closely; daily attendance registers are taken at the beginning of each day and in lessons. The attendance of students on placements at external providers continues to be high. However, the overall attendance figures remain low because of a small number of students who have never attended the centre and a group of students who are persistently absent. New plans and actions are in place to improve the attendance of individual students who are persistently absent. However, there has not yet been time for the impact of these actions to be fully evaluated.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise attendance by improving the management of behaviour – satisfactory
- reduce the exclusion rate by 50% over the next term so that it can be used as a final sanction rather than an everyday occurrence – good

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning seen during this visit was better than that reported previously, with particularly good elements in relation to the management of students' poor behaviour. In most lessons, however, there is a lack of focus on the individual abilities and needs of students. Lesson plans provide a much needed structure for teachers to work within. However, plans contain insufficient details of the intended learning outcomes for individual students. In the lessons observed, students behaved in a compliant way but only a few showed interest or enjoyment in learning. The development of teaching and learning has been identified as a key priority by the executive headteacher and extensive development work is planned.



Students are offered a wide range of training programmes through the involvement of external providers. During this visit there was no opportunity to visit external providers. However, the previous inspection identified that students generally respond well to these opportunities and historically attendance is higher and behaviour better. There is little evidence available to measure the positive impact of these programmes on students' future education, employment or training.

The staff student ratios at Ashdale are very high, with students often being supported in very small groups or on an individual basis. The quality of care, guidance and support has improved since the previous inspection. However, its impact on individual students is not tracked sufficiently. New initiatives are planned and focus well on students' welfare, particularly with regard to their health and attitudes to smoking. However, these measures will need time to be introduced, become accepted by students and have the desired impact. Many students have difficulties with reading and writing. Some teachers attempt to support students by correcting spelling mistakes and handwriting, but too little is done to provide them with strategies to improve consistently. The detailed single central record of safeguarding checks shown to the inspector complies with current government regulations.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve teaching and learning by raising expectations and improving teachers' skills in managing behaviour in lessons – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Shortly after the previous inspection the temporary teacher-in-charge put in place quickly introduced measures to address the serious weaknesses in behaviour and the high numbers of exclusions identified by that inspection. This had a significant impact on improving the general atmosphere in the centre and on attendance. The new executive headteacher, although very recently appointed, has made a good start in consolidating these improvements. All leaders and managers acknowledge the scale of the task ahead and there is much to be done to build upon the improvements made so far.

Wide-ranging action plans have been developed by the local authority and the management committee that focus on the key areas for improvement. This process is linked to a wider review of the provision of support for students with behavioural, social or emotional problems in Middlesbrough. A new building has already been started and there are proposals to bring the work of the two PRUs under one roof. The Ashdale centre action plan sets clear short-term targets for improvement. More long-term goals and targets are being devised by the executive headteacher after a more thorough evaluation of the work of the centre. The current action plan does not explicitly state the timescale within which it is envisaged that the removal of special measures will take place. It is, therefore, difficult to measure the level of



overall progress. The plan contains little information regarding the PRU's responsibility for the education of students in hospital and how this will be developed and resourced.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve self-evaluation by developing more comprehensive ways of measuring progress and evaluating the impact of action taken to bring about improvement – satisfactory

#### External support

The local authority has provided satisfactory support to the PRU; it has been particularly strong in taking immediate action to improve the behaviour of students in the centre. High levels of support and resources are being provided. A number of school improvement personnel and external consultants support the work of the new leader. The pace of change is beginning to accelerate, but the local authority acknowledges the need to secure more significant improvements over the next few months. The statement of action fulfils most requirements and provides a reasonable agenda for change. There is a need for greater clarity in how the various plans and interventions in Middlesbrough will specifically impact on the Ashdale centre.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the attendance of students who are persistently absent or do not attend at all.
- Improve the system used to track the progress of individual students in English, mathematics and science.
- Extend the variety of activities used by teachers to ensure that students become more engaged and challenged by learning.