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Mrs J Spensley
Stafford Pupil Referral Unit
The Stables
The Hollis
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Dear Mrs Spensley,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF STAFFORD PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

Introduction

Following my visit with Mark Emy, Additional Inspector, to your pupil referral unit (PRU) on 27 and 28 February, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the PRU became subject to special measures in September 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the PRU's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, other staff, individual pupils, a set of parents, the chair of the management committee, a representative from the local authority (LA), and representatives of Connexions, the Education Welfare Service, a local school and the education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) service.

Context

Since the previous inspection the management committee has been reorganised and a chair has been appointed. There are now 17 students on roll, an increase of 10 since the previous inspection.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement has improved since the last inspection because of a very good increase in teaching time and the PRU's improved effectiveness at re-engaging students in learning. All students are now offered their entitlement to 25 hours education per week, although at present not all are taking advantage of this and numbers at the unit are still low. The PRU has had not had to close for periods in this school year as had occurred in the previous year. As a result, students have not had unplanned gaps in their education once they have been referred and joined the PRU.

Students' improved achievement is demonstrated by the increased success in reintegrating students to mainstream education. Reintegration of four students has occurred so far in this academic year. The standards students reach are understandably below average and their overall achievement remains inadequate. Individual targets are set for behaviour and learning. However, the monitoring of students' progress towards targets as an indicator of their achievement is at an early stage of development and is stronger for behaviour than for learning. Limited evaluation of students' academic achievement takes place, for example, in respect of National Curriculum levels or improvements in relation to assessments made when students first join the PRU.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2006:

- raise achievement and increase the amount of curriculum time offered to pupils – good.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being, judged inadequate at the last inspection, are now satisfactory. Attendance has improved greatly. The unit actively encourages students to attend and students say how much they enjoy coming to the unit. As a consequence, students who had previously been poor or sporadic attenders earlier in their educational careers improve their attendance and therefore their achievement.

Students' understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles has improved. Students benefit from more opportunities to undertake physical activity through timetabled physical education sessions, rock climbing and some extracurricular activities such as table tennis or dance. Further encouragement to live a healthy lifestyle is beginning to be increased through the development of a personal, health and social education curriculum. Students are now more suitably prepared for their future economic well-being because they are attending the unit more and having increased opportunities to develop the necessary skills to support them in their future lives. Many older students know what job they would like to do and are now more

effectively supported in achieving their aspirations through the good partnerships that have been established with Connexions and other educational providers.

Quality of provision

During the inspection three lessons were observed and these confirmed that the quality of teaching and learning remains satisfactory. Students say how much they now enjoy learning, as opposed to their experiences in other schools. One student proudly pointed out that this was the first time he had been in a school for three years. Relationships between staff and students are good and teachers and learning support assistants continue to work well together in the management of students' behaviour. Teachers' planning makes use of national subject guidelines but makes too few adaptations to meet the specific needs of each individual student. For example, in a mathematics lesson observed the work set was far too difficult for at least one pupil although the topic was relevant.

The previous inspection report highlighted weaknesses in assessment and in setting improvement targets. A start has been made to address these and new procedures have been agreed and very recently implemented. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these, although a scrutiny of assessment records and students' target booklets shows some inconsistency in how staff are implementing these. A scrutiny of students' workbooks shows that they are not always marked and this further reduces the information staff and students themselves have on how well they are achieving.

The curriculum has improved and is now satisfactory. The timetable covers all expected subjects and has interesting additions. Pupils have responded well to the structure and consistency and this is supporting their engagement in learning. Local authority consultants have provided useful support in moderating curriculum policies, schemes of work, assessment and accreditation. However, these are at various stages of development and implementation and do not yet consistently support and guide teaching and learning. Outside bodies such as the Fire Service and Relate are enhancing the curriculum, supported by a suitable range of visits, for example to the local court.

The process of reintegration for students, a key purpose of the unit, is now benefiting from improved relationships and communication with other providers and schools. Appropriately a suitably flexible and tailored approach is taken, based on individual need.

Care, guidance and support have also improved but overall remain inadequate. A strong feature is the high quality support for students' personal development. Excellent links have been established with other agencies, which are proving to be of great benefit to students in dealing with personal

issues as well as preparing for the next stages of their education. Sessions during the school day, such as the breakfast club and 'getting ready for learning', prove invaluable in giving students the chance to raise issues of concern and settle before starting lessons. The support students receive is effective in re-engaging students in learning. Much less effective though is the support and guidance each individual student is receiving to improve their academic progress. Targets for learning are inconsistent in focus and purpose. They do not securely inform teaching and students themselves do not know what their learning targets are. This weakness was highlighted in the previous inspection and remains an aspect to be developed further.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, only in post a few days at the time of the previous inspection, has had a very positive impact on developing the effectiveness of the PRU. Her excellent leadership skills have resulted in the PRU successfully tackling many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Because of this, the PRU is demonstrating that it has a good capacity to improve further. The headteacher correctly recognised that a key initial priority was to bring the staff together as a team and to establish consistency in what the PRU was offering its students. She has done this well and, as a result, morale amongst staff is good and students are now benefiting from a far more consistent approach to meeting their needs. These improvements have ensured that other agencies now recognise the PRU as an important part of the local authority's provision for disaffected students.

Good progress has been made in developing the effectiveness of the management committee. Successful efforts have been made to bolster its membership and set up regular meetings. A chair has been appointed and he and other members of the committee are now regular visitors and very supportive of the PRU's work. This has increased the involvement of other stakeholders, a weakness identified in the previous inspection.

The PRU has used the action plan from the previous inspection as its framework for developing its effectiveness and this is appropriate, given the many aspects in need of improvement. The fact that so many aspects judged previously to be inadequate have been improved demonstrates that leadership and management have been effective. However, although anecdotal evidence points to good progress of some individual students, there is a lack of overall evidence on students' achievements to demonstrate the extent to which the PRU is effective. Teaching and learning have been considered informally but not in a way that assesses the impact on students' progress. Plans have been made to do this but, at the time of this inspection, have not been implemented.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2006:

- devise and implement a realistic development plan for all aspects of the unit's provision, with targets and deadlines that are agreed by all stakeholders – satisfactory
- introduce robust procedures to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and to monitor pupils' progress – inadequate.

External support

The PRU has received good support from the local authority. Subject consultants and a school improvement officer have been fully involved and effective in supporting the PRU in improving its provision. The actions within the local authority's plan have proved useful but, as requested by Ofsted, adjustments have not been made to the plan to assist the PRU to recognise its effectiveness. This means that the plan is not giving the PRU sufficient support to identify students' achievements and using information gained from this to judge its effectiveness.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Additional Inspector