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Mrs J Spensley
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Spensley

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Stafford PRU

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 July 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school 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

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with headteacher, individual students, the chair of the management committee, the chair of the schools' inclusion group and an officer of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the previous visit the PRU has appointed a deputy headteacher who will commence his duties in September 2007. In addition, an experienced teacher has been seconded to the PRU and she will also commence her duties in September 2007.

Achievement and standards

The PRU has continued to offer additional teaching time to students and this has given students increased opportunities to achieve and improve their skills. This has led to students completing an increased amount of completed work in their books.

The standards the students achieve are still below average, but for all students this is because they have missed a great deal of education prior to being offered a placement at the PRU. Good evidence of students' achievements in science is available. Students' individual plans show the topics students have covered and the knowledge they have gained. This is less apparent in other subjects, where although there have been some assessments undertaken, records do not clearly demonstrate the rate of progress students are making. There are, however, individual examples of good progress in specific areas. For example, one student, who has been in the PRU for less than a year, has increased his reading age by over two years. Staff continue to set improvement targets for students but, as at the time of the previous visit, progress against these targets is not evaluated.

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 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Students continue to benefit from the PRU's emphasis on helping them to understand the benefits of healthy living. Students themselves are able to talk about eating a balanced diet and the benefits of engaging in physical activity. They eat the fruit that is available for them when they arrive in the morning and at break and explain the benefits of regularly drinking water. During a current project on healthy living a student was able to discuss the dangers of alcohol.

Students feel staff listen to them. This is demonstrated by a display of the ideas they have put forward at the student council. An example of one of these is a request to redecorate their common room. This is being addressed by staff and, during the inspection, plans were being made for this to be undertaken. Attendance continues to improve for many students, although at the time of the visit actual attendance figures were not available due to administration difficulties.

Quality of provision

Monitoring of lessons by the headteacher and LA shows that there are examples of good teaching practice in the PRU. For example, teaching assistants offer good support to individual students both in relation to their behaviour and in keeping students on task. However, there are still aspects of teaching and learning where improvement is needed. This was confirmed during the inspection in an English lesson when all three students in the class left before the end of the lesson. This was an example of teachers not always being able to manage the behaviour of students and successfully engage them in learning. Individual learning plans have been established for many students but these are not being completed regularly by staff and therefore they are not an effective means of measuring students' progress or planning future work. Good improvement, though, has been made to the quality of

marking and, as a result, students now know how well they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum continues to be satisfactory and students benefit from a very good emphasis on personal, social and health education. Students continue to have good opportunities to engage in physical activities despite the limitations of the accommodation. There has been an increase in the emphasis placed on ensuring students' individual programmes are best suited to their needs and preferences, particularly for those in Years 10 and 11. This means that these students, who are unable to cope with the demands of a mainstream education, are provided with suitable opportunities to continue to learn and prepare for life after school. There is also good emphasis on ecological awareness and this has been recognised through the school receiving an Eco Bronze Award.

The quality of the supervision of students is good and this ensures that students are safe. Recent child protection training for staff has ensured staff are fully up to date with procedures. Support and guidance provided for students' personal development remain stronger than that provided for their academic improvement. Weekly mentoring sessions and six weekly pastoral meetings demonstrate the commitment of the PRU to discussing students' progress. The pastoral meetings are well attended by parents and students. A scrutiny of the minutes of these meetings, however, shows that there is insufficient evidence gathered to show how well students are achieving. This, therefore, means there are limitations in the ability of these meetings to set students achievable improvement targets and has resulted in a number of targets being vague and unhelpful.

Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to provide an effective style of leadership and management that is having a positive impact on the quality of the work of the PRU and in raising its profile within the LA. However, the PRU's own evaluation of how well it is doing is limited because insufficient information is collated on aspects such as students' progress or how well they do when they return to mainstream (known as performance indicators). This means the PRU does not have data to show how effective it is.

The PRU's growing importance to the range of educational provision within the LA has been recognised by secondary school headteachers collectively funding the post of an additional teaching assistant to support the reintegration of students back into mainstream schools.

The headteacher, with the support of the LA, has worked hard to address the issue from the last inspection about establishing clear procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, monitoring of teaching is now good and strengths and weaknesses have been identified. The second part of the issue related to

monitoring students' progress continues to be a weakness, although the newly formulated individual education plans are a start in tackling this aspect.

The PRU has produced a good revised school improvement plan. This is well set out and shows how the PRU will seek to improve what it offers and the quality of its effectiveness. A strength of the plan is the links made to show how each development will have a positive outcome on students' progress.

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 – good
- introduce robust procedures to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and to monitor pupils' progress – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to offer good quality support to the PRU and this is having a positive impact on its work. The school improvement partner has worked with the headteacher to consider the school's improvement plan. The 'core' committee has met regularly and is offering positive support to the headteacher in her efforts to improve the quality of provision.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of the information available on students' achievements and make more use of this to plan lessons.
- Identify performance indicators to show the PRU's effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Additional Inspector