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28 January 2011

Mrs Durston
Thurrock Pupil Referral Unit
The Culver Centre
Daiglen Drive
South Ockenden
RM15 5RR

Dear Mrs Durston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Thurrock Pupil Referral Unit

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 26 and Thursday 27 January 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 Thurrock.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Improve the learning and progress of primary pupils by strengthening teaching and assessment, providing a broad and balanced curriculum matched to pupils' abilities and the requirements in their statements of special educational needs and ensuring they receive their entitlement to a full-time education.
- Improve attendance for the majority of pupils so that they spend more time in learning.
- Improve leadership and management by establishing clear roles and lines of responsibility, ensuring the monitoring and evaluation of provision and outcomes are rigorous and used well to plan improvements, and developing strong partnerships which will aid pupils' quick return to school.

Special measures: monitoring of Thurrock Pupil Referral Unit

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 January 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the PRU's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher of the Culver centre, the assistant headteacher of the Phoenix centre, the chair of the management committee and three representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since January 2011, a new assistant headteacher has been in post at the Phoenix centre. There are currently seven pupils in Key Stage 2. The Culver centre has 26 Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils on site and a further 10 who are taught off site. The local authority's Review of Inclusion and Special Educational Needs which includes the future role of the PRU has not been completed. The report is now scheduled for March 2011.

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

In the Phoenix centre, the poor behaviour observed during the previous monitoring visit has been addressed and the PRU is a much calmer place to be. Pupils and staff work harmoniously during breaks and lunchtimes which promote pupils' positive attitudes and build strong relations. Observations of lessons confirmed that in general, pupils are progressing satisfactorily. The new assistant headteacher has implemented weekly monitoring of teachers' planning and new assessment procedures to track how well individual pupils are doing. This is adding consistency to the quality of teaching but not the quality of pupils' learning because plans are not always matched to pupils' abilities or the personal requirements in their statements of special educational need.

In the Culver centre, lesson observations confirmed that pupils who regularly attend are making sufficient progress due to the quality of teaching and the care and support provided for them. Most pupils engage well with staff and are kept informed of their progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance rates at the Phoenix centre have fluctuated since the previous visit but overall show signs of improvement; 86% of pupils have attended regularly since the start of this year. Most of them receive their full entitlement to learning and two new pupils are on reduced timetables as part of their integration into the PRU. The high

rate of exclusions recorded last term has been addressed and no pupils have been excluded so far this year, reflecting the improved standard of pupils' behaviour.

Attendance at the Culver centre has increased slightly to 78% but this is below the national average and it remains a stumbling-block that is proving difficult to overcome. The persistent absence of a small hard core of disaffected pupils and the transient nature of some who attend for short periods of time and then move to another area is presenting real challenges for the PRU. A range of strategies is employed to monitor attendance and the reasons for pupils' absence are well known. The PRU and local authority support staff are working together to engage pupils who do not regularly attend and involve their parents, but this is having little impact on securing and sustaining better attendance. Only one pupil has been excluded since the last monitoring visit.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance for the majority of pupils so that they spend more time in learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Teachers in the Phoenix centre are adept at managing and changing pupils' behaviours, showing great patience and understanding when pupils elect not to cooperate. They nurture them by engaging them in discussion, offering lots of praise and rewards for good behaviour. This is contributing directly to improving behaviour and attitudes towards learning. At times, the care, guidance and support provided for pupils hinders their ability to work independently and teachers end up doing the work for them, especially if they are asked to write things down. Teaching assistants remain under-used in some lessons.

A new lesson plan is used in core subjects but elsewhere teachers rely upon medium-term plans which lack sufficient detail. Limited progress has been made in improving pupils' access to information and communication technology. Improved assessment procedures are in place but are not yet embedded and teachers are not using the information they have of each pupil to plan different tasks matched to their specific needs. Their personal learning plans (PLPs) contain targets to improve attitudes and behaviour but not for raising standards of literacy and numeracy. In Key Stage 4, PLPs include targets for improving behaviour, attendance and occasionally specific targets linked to GCSE outcomes, but this is variable and dependent upon who formulates the plan.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the learning and progress of primary pupils by strengthening teaching and assessment, providing a broad and balanced curriculum matched to pupils' abilities and the requirements in their statements of special educational needs and ensuring they receive their entitlement to a full-time education – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There is greater clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the leaders of both centres which is leading to some improvement. In a short space of time, the assistant headteacher has fostered good relations between staff and pupils, improved the management of pupils' behaviour and created a positive learning environment in the Phoenix centre. Future plans for the overall leadership of the PRU after March 2011 have been shared with staff but the delay in completing the strategic review means that the future role of the PRU remains uncertain. Current arrangements for leading both centres and the responsibility for duty of care in the absence of senior leaders are unclear. Self-evaluation is stronger in the secondary base than in the primary base.

Monitoring progress against the targets listed in the local authority statement of action and improvement plans has improved. Senior leaders, the management committee and the local authority are now working together and are able to demonstrate that improvements to provision are being made. A sub-group of the management committee has added rigour to the monitoring procedures by assuming responsibility for measuring and reporting on progress made. Both centres have reintegrated a small number of pupils into mainstream schools since the last monitoring visit. Until the outcomes of the strategic review are known and further consultation with schools take place, partnerships with the PRU remain under-developed. Schools continue to refer pupils to the PRU for 'time out' without clear, coherent plans to reintegrate them back into mainstream schools.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management by establishing clear roles and lines of responsibility, ensuring the monitoring and evaluation of provision and outcomes are rigorous and used well to plan improvements, and developing strong partnerships which will aid pupils' quick return to school – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has amended its plans for improving the PRU and is demonstrating a much more coordinated and committed approach to resolving the issues raised in the last inspection. It is much more consultative and is forging stronger relations between the PRU, its management committee and local schools. A schedule of visits for senior leaders and staff to observe the good practice in other effective PRUs and schools has been facilitated. A new school improvement partner has been allocated to the PRU and her support is valued by the headteacher of the Culver centre. Plans to provide the same support to the assistant headteacher of the Phoenix centre are in place.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no priorities for further improvement. HMI has advised the PRU to retain its focus on resolving the three areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection and to await the outcomes of the strategic review in March 2011.