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7 July 2011

Ms R Durston
Headteacher
Thurrock Pupil Referral Unit
The Culver Centre
Daiglan Drive
South Ockendon
RM15 5RR

Dear Ms Durston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Thurrock Pupil Referral Unit

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 July 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 third 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 is 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 third monitoring inspection on 5 July 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher of the Culver centre, the assistant headteacher of the Phoenix centre, the newly appointed interim head of pupil support services and the interim deputy headteacher of the secondary PRU, the chair of the management committee and three representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last visit the headteacher of the Culver centre has announced her retirement in August this year. As part of the local authority's review, an interim headteacher of pupil support services has been appointed to oversee the development of the service and an interim deputy headteacher appointed to lead the Culver centre until two permanent appointments are made. One member of support staff and a supply teacher have left the Culver centre. Currently it has 22 Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils on-site and a further 11 pupils who are taught off-site. At the Phoenix centre, a Key Stage 2 teacher has left and a supply teacher has been appointed to fill the vacancy on a temporary basis. It has 12 pupils on-site and one pupil who is taught at a neighbouring school.

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

In the Phoenix centre, pupils continue to progress satisfactorily. Joint observations between HMI and the assistant headteacher found that when teachers are well prepared and use regular praise to engage all pupils in speaking and listening tasks, pupils make good progress. Progress is satisfactory in mathematics, but learning is not modelled for pupils so they easily forget how to do calculations and technical language is not always reinforced. Teachers make assessments each half term and pupils are involved in daily self-assessments to gauge how well they are doing against the targets set for them. Five pupils in Year 6 sat national tests this year and their results were in line with predictions.

In the Culver centre, a smaller proportion of pupils sat GCSE examinations this year than previously. A significant proportion of them pursued other accreditation and on some courses attained well. For example, 12 pupils completed the Princes' Trust award and a larger proportion attained bronze, silver and gold awards this year than in 2010.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

In the Phoenix centre, teachers know individual pupils well and manage their behaviour much more consistently. The numbers of exclusions and incidents requiring restraint of pupils have been dramatically reduced this year. Most pupils receive their full entitlement to learning. Notably, half of all pupils in Key stage 2 regularly have 100% attendance, but overall rates have fallen from above to below the national average in recent months.

Attendance at the Culver centre remains a significant obstacle to pupils' achievement. Despite their efforts, staff have had little impact on tackling the persistent absence of a small hard core of disaffected pupils and some transient pupils who only attend for short periods of time. Attendance and absence rates remain below the 80% target set in its improvement plan and show few signs of improvement since the last visit. A home-school liaison officer has been recently appointed to improve attendance, but much more time is needed before this leads to higher attendance. Behaviour remains satisfactory: only three pupils have been temporarily excluded since the last 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 in the Phoenix centre and inadequate in the Culver centre.

The effectiveness of provision

Key Stage 2 provision is improving due to regular lesson observations and scrutiny of teachers' planning. Lesson plans are increasingly referring to pupils' specific needs contained in their individual education plans. Staff development and training has focused on improving literacy and improving resources which are helping to promote pupils' reading. Similar developments to promote numeracy are planned for next term. There are few opportunities for pupils to develop their writing and limited guidance is provided to help them model good work. New interactive whiteboards help teachers to capture and retain pupils' interest and to actively engage them in learning. Enrichment activities, such as music lessons and sports competitions, are used effectively to reward pupils for good behaviour. Despite these improvements, the leadership's monitoring shows that some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain which leaves the PRU's target of 50% of good or better teaching by December 2011 a challenging one.

In Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils who regularly attend progress satisfactorily. The curriculum provides suitable opportunities for them to study GCSE and additional accreditation and to gain experience in work placements. However, the combination of poor attendance by a significant minority of pupils and, consequently, a high

proportion not accessing their full entitlement to learning is compromising their overall achievement.

Progress since the last section 5 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

The leader of the Phoenix centre continues to raise expectations and drive improvements. Self-evaluation and improvement planning are increasingly rigorous and monitoring and evaluation is becoming routine. She is forging stronger links with local schools and agencies to increase opportunities for pupils and is encouraging parents and carers to work with staff at the centre. One pupil will be reintegrated into a mainstream secondary school in September. Arrangements for leading the Phoenix centre in the absence of the assistant headteacher remain unclear and the assistant headteacher has had to assume responsibility for completing pupils' statutory assessments. This places further constraints on her time to lead and manage the centre.

The instability caused by the imminent departure of the headteacher of the Culver centre is leading to some uncertainty. However, the newly appointed interim leaders are already gaining an understanding of the PRU and the issues it faces. They are working alongside the current headteacher to ensure a smooth transition towards the start of the next academic year. Although some initial progress has been made in strengthening relations with local schools, no Key Stage 3 pupils have been reintegrated into mainstream schools this year. The management committee continues to regularly monitor the PRU's progress against the targets set in its improvement plan. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorously administered and regular checks are made.

Progress since the last section 5 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's Review of Inclusion and Special Educational Needs is under way and identifies a clear role for PRU provision in the Borough. Local schools have been consulted to find a school to host Key Stage 2 provision after the planned closure of the Phoenix centre site which is not fully fit for purpose. Leaders of both centres value the support provided by improvement officers this year.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve overall attendance to at least 85% across the PRU by:
 - carrying out a thorough review of procedures to improve attendance and fully evaluate their effectiveness
 - mobilising the full support of the local authority and partner agencies to increase attendance and target this combined support towards those pupils that do attend periodically but show signs of disengaging
 - arranging suitable alternative provision for those pupils who are persistently absent from the PRU and show no intention of returning
 - liaising with other local providers to source good practice in re-engaging pupils in education and training.

- Ensure that, by the time of the next monitoring visit, new arrangements for leading and managing the PRU show clear signs of embedding and are accelerating the progress made in addressing the areas for improvement raised in the last inspection.