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Mr G Levitt
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Dear Mr Levitt

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CALDECOTT FOUNDATION SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 February 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in May 2005.

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

Evidence

During the inspection I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of governors, the chief executive of the Trust, and a group of pupils from the school council.

Context

The school is a non-maintained residential special school. Following the resignation of the previous headteacher in August 2005 the charity which owns the school appointed an experienced headteacher on an interim basis to lead and manage the school. This arrangement is likely to last for a few years until the charity's proposed reorganisation is complete. This reorganisation aims to integrate all parts of the charity's provision including the school and the houses in which the pupils live.

Achievement and standards

The pupils attain standards well below the national average because of the nature of their special educational needs. Pupils' progress is now satisfactory overall. The pupils have missed out on significant amounts of schooling in the past. After they join the school, the pupils are given good individual guidance, attend more lessons, their behaviour improves and they are taught more effectively in small groups. As a consequence, they make at least satisfactory progress in lessons and, in half the lessons seen, their progress was good. Progress has improved in part because of the improved quality of teaching and also because the pupils are keen to learn and want to contribute. Nevertheless, learning and progress are still slowed by weaknesses in the teachers' planning which do not always allow sufficiently for the wide range of learning needs even in a small group.

The pupils' achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) is now satisfactory. The school has provided teachers with good training and equipment and senior staff are monitoring lessons to check that pupils are given frequent opportunities to practise and improve their skills. In a good science lesson the pupils had to identify what factors might be involved in a car's ability to stop quickly. The pupils had to research the topic on the internet and produce a spreadsheet. This use of technology kept the pupils interested throughout the lesson.

There are still further developments required in ICT and in supporting improvements in achievement in literacy and numeracy. Opportunities for pupils to practise and develop these basic skills are missed at times because teachers' planning does not yet specify how skills, including those in ICT, are to be used and developed. There are not enough interactive whiteboards available in the school for teachers to use them whenever it is appropriate. The pupils do not yet have the opportunity to practise their ICT skills in the residential accommodation although this is planned for next academic year.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve pupils' achievement where this is unsatisfactory, particularly ensuring that pupils' ICT skills are supported and developed in school and in the residences—satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils say that they like coming to school, principally because behaviour is better managed, activities are more interesting, and the atmosphere is calmer. As an indication of this the school has achieved sustained improvement in attendance both in school and in lessons. Teachers are showing greater skills and consistency in the way they manage difficult behaviour and, as a consequence, the pupils now behave well in class and around the school. They settle quickly in lessons and focus readily on their work with only occasional outbursts. For these pupils, this is a good achievement. Far fewer pupils are removed from lessons than previously and there has also been a sharp reduction in exclusions from school. A few pupils continue to find it very difficult to maintain control throughout the school day. These pupils are

now given different kinds of support, including specially adapted timetables, and so they are able to make better progress overall. The pupils maintain that some bullying goes on, but on the whole this is dealt with well.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- support pupils effectively to help them manage their own behaviour—good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is a higher proportion of lessons in which teaching is judged good than at the time of the last inspection. This is in line with the school's own view of its quality. There are strong relationships between staff, especially support staff, and the pupils. Staff manage the pupils with consistency, calmness and affection. The activities provided are often imaginative and interesting to the pupils. In a lesson on 'Macbeth', for example, a teacher explored with her class the characters' reactions to the death of Duncan. She did this by setting the classroom out as a crime scene with a white outline of a body on the floor and overturned furniture and clues scattered around. When the pupils came in, they were startled by the scene and immediately began investigating 'Whodunit?'

At the last inspection, there were significant weaknesses in learning mostly because of absence, disruptive behaviour, and poor planning. Attendance in lessons has improved and is now satisfactory. Staff now manage disruptive behaviour much better. The school has introduced a school-wide system for the promotion of positive behaviour to which all staff adhere and which the pupils consider fair. Staff have received training on how to defuse potentially difficult situations. Lessons are now planned in some detail and are well organised. However, planning does not always take sufficient account of the learning needs of pupils of different abilities. As a consequence some pupils say they find the work too easy whilst others say that it is too hard. When planning is not well enough matched to pupils' differing needs progress is slowed. Teachers do not always identify every opportunity to give pupils practice in their basic skills or to work towards their individual objectives.

The senior leadership team has introduced a broader curriculum which better meets the needs of the pupils. There is a new rolling programme in the primary department to ensure coverage of subjects and all aspects of the National Curriculum subjects are now being taught in line with pupils' Statements. A few pupils have severe emotional difficulties which prevent them from obtaining full benefit from the standard curriculum which the school offers. These pupils are given specially adapted timetables which better meet their current needs.

The headteacher is forging much closer and stronger links with the managers of the residential accommodation. The plans to fully integrate all parts of the Trust's provision over the next year or so should benefit the pupils enormously. It should ensure consistency in the care, guidance and support pupils receive. Some of this work has already been completed. Support staff are now beginning to operate in

both the houses and the classrooms. However, the school's good work in improving attendance is being hampered by inconsistent reporting of absence from residential managers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- ensure that all parts of the organisation work together to fully meet pupils' needs—satisfactory progress
- improve learning by giving attention to the best ways pupils learn, improving planning to meet all pupils' needs and ensuring that pupils are present in lessons—satisfactory progress
- provide the full National Curriculum in line with pupils' Statements—good progress.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher, all staff and governors are working well together with a shared resolve to do their best for the pupils. The headteacher's vision is clearly formulated and is reflected in the well constructed post inspection action plan. The action plan makes clear the school's priorities to build up leadership and management, support higher achievement, and improve teaching, behaviour and attendance.

In his determination to quickly eliminate the causes of the school's serious weaknesses the headteacher has the full support of staff who are all similarly committed to improvement. The action plan provides a clear statement of the necessary actions, timescales and success criteria which enable the school to see whether it has achieved the desired results. The plan is informed by an accurate analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are regularly observed in their work by the headteacher and an external consultant is employed to provide a further objective evaluation.

Even though the headteacher has only been in post for a few months he has already established a track record of robust effective action. All health and safety issues have been quickly resolved. Attendance has improved markedly and exclusions have been significantly reduced. The headteacher has taken the first steps to increase the effectiveness of the senior management team in order to enhance its ability to rapidly improve teaching, learning and achievement. Once this phase has been completed, the priority will be to widen the roles of the coordinators to involve them in monitoring provision in subjects.

Governors are very committed to changing the school for the better. They have begun to take a more direct role in the life of the school and to provide a more objective assessment of the developments taking place. Their committees are now better informed and involved in monitoring the school's performance. Together with the charity which owns the school, governors have taken the necessary action to reduce costs, and increase efficiency.

The school has the necessary capacity for further improvement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve leadership and management at all levels–satisfactory progress
- ensure effective monitoring of health and safety and ensure issues are quickly resolved–good progress.

External support

The charitable trust which owns the school has provided strong support since the last inspection. It is keen to rectify the school's weaknesses and has incorporated the remedial action identified by the headteacher into its own corporate plan. This provides a robust statement of action and has brought additional benefits to the school. For example, the inspection identified the need for a consistent approach to pupils between the school and the houses, especially in behaviour management. The Trust has improved the employment arrangements for support staff so that many will now work in both settings. The school employs an experienced adviser to replicate the external support it would receive if it were maintained by a local authority. It has also commissioned the help of another school which deals very effectively with similar pupils. This other school acts as a professional critical friend and provides guidance, training and opportunities for staff to discuss and view good practice.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers' planning helps pupils to progress as well as they should by taking account of their individual needs and objectives.
- Ensure that pupils are given opportunities to improve basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT throughout the day and in the residential accommodation.
- Ensure that the residential managers follow the correct procedures in reporting absences promptly.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the chief executive of the Caldecott Foundation.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mick Megee

Additional Inspector