

Ms D Horlock
Head of Centre
The New Broadwalk Pupil Referral Unit
The Broadwalk Centre
Belvedere Road
Salford
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9 June 2006

Dear Ms Horlock

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE NEW BROADWALK PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

Introduction

Following my visit to your unit on 7 and 8 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2005.

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 unit's work, visited six lessons, scrutinised documents and met with you, your deputy, the leaders for the core subjects, the head of the education inclusion service, groups of pupils, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

On both days of the monitoring visit half the pupils were off site for part or all of the day on curriculum enrichment activities and a preparation course for transfer to Key Stage 4. At the time of this visit there were 31 pupils registered at the unit, an increase of approximately 50% on the number on roll at the beginning of the school year. In addition to its population of permanently excluded pupils, the unit now receives pupils preparing for a managed move between high schools.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' attainment on entry to the unit remains generally below national expectations, especially in literacy and numeracy, and for some pupils their skill levels are very low indeed. However, now that the unit has established a baseline of assessment in reading, spelling, mathematics and science it is clear that some pupils are able to perform in aspects of the core subjects at age-appropriate levels. For example, a number of pupils have reading and spelling ages in line with their chronological ages but have much weaker writing skills. In science, assessments show that pupils' knowledge and understanding range across National Curriculum Levels 3 to 5. A similar picture exists in mathematics.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall but this remains insufficient to close the gaps in their learning, which are now much clearer to see. In mathematics and science, data from the recently established assessment process shows the progress made by individual pupils from January to April of this year. In most cases, it is satisfactory and in one or two cases good. Not surprisingly, pupils with the poorest attendance records make least progress. The very small numbers of pupils on the 'Toe by Toe' reading initiative continue to make good progress and improve their reading and spelling ages. As a matter of urgency, this initiative needs to be extended to others who might benefit from it.

The best progress made by pupils in a lesson was in a chemistry lesson on elements, compounds and the filtration process. The level of work was challenging but all pupils wanted to engage in the lesson, including one boy who was removed for being disruptive but asked to return for the practical session. The more able of the pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of elements and compounds and the filtration process. As important was the pupils' enjoyment in what they were doing and learning. The challenge for the unit now is to make all the teaching, especially of the core subjects, demanding, interesting and very precisely matched to pupils' levels of attainment to ensure that their progress becomes consistently good.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory overall. It is improving as the strategies to foster self-control, develop confidence and promote higher expectations become embedded. The unit's recent focus on reducing bad language has been particularly successful; there is much less swearing by pupils who, with the constant support of staff, increasingly check themselves and control outbursts. By and large, most pupils follow instructions in lessons although the disruptive behaviour of one or two undermines the sessions for others. However, in these cases, after a warning the disruptive pupils are withdrawn from the group and this enables the others to continue their lesson. The points system, developed by the learning mentors, is well established and successful. Pupils are very keen to gain recognition for attending lessons on

time, following instructions and behaving well. The rewards for achieving their personal targets are widely appreciated.

Attitudes to learning remain variable overall but on this visit there were encouraging signs of pupils engaging with their more formal lessons in the unit as well as those off site. In all but one of the six lessons observed pupils completed the work set for them. Pupils' attitudes reflect their interest in and their views of the relevance of the work provided. Through considerable recent professional development and the work completed on assessment, the staff have recognised that improvements in pupils' attitudes are linked to the match of teaching to pupils' needs and to the range of strategies employed to engage them.

Behaviour falls down at lunchtime in the dining room, when some pupils revert to inappropriate ways of dealing with others.

Attendance has improved. It is still well below national averages but it is improving. This is due to the relentless actions of the learning mentors and other staff to tackle the problem of poor attendance. The team has established a system of first-day telephone calls, home and work visits and collaborative working with the education welfare service (EWS) and its efforts are beginning to bear fruit. The unit has also been well supported in its drive to improve attendance by the local authority, especially the head of the education inclusion service, who has arranged a minibus service to collect pupils who live furthest from the unit. The impact of this very recent pilot initiative is not yet clear. The current attendance figure for the unit is 72%. This is in line with the 10% termly improvement figure originally given in the action plan and edges the unit closer to the 80% target for autumn 2006 that it agreed with the EWS. The team now has a much tighter system for collecting and analysing attendance data. As a result, it can show that attendance figures for individual pupils remain very variable and in some cases far too low. The learning mentors and staff know that the next challenge is to maintain and build upon the current levels of attendance whilst tackling the persistent non-attenders, many of whose truancies are condoned by parents.

Judgement

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

- improve the attendance and punctuality of pupils so that they have the opportunity to achieve well - satisfactory progress
- improve pupils' attitudes to learning, their behaviour and personal development – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The off-site provision organised through the 'I can do' programme continues to have a positive impact on pupils' personal development and remains a popular feature of the unit's provision. Since the criticism levelled at the more formal teaching and assessment provision during the previous monitoring visit, the unit has focused more sharply on these two areas. Staff now follow a common format for planning lessons, learning objectives are shared with pupils, and more use is made of the interactive whiteboards. The establishment of a baseline assessment in the core skills and the sharing of this information with pupils mean that the pupils are now more aware of their levels of attainment. Teachers have provided pupils with targets for improvement but, except in the case of science, these are not yet sharp enough to help pupils understand what they have to do next to improve their work or to guide the teaching precisely enough to ensure good progress. The unit has initiated meetings for parents; two of which have taken place so far. In the latest, 80% of parents attended and the feedback from those who gave it was very positive, citing particularly the usefulness of the ideas for managing behaviour at home.

Of the six lessons observed, one was good, four were satisfactory and one was inadequate. Common features in the satisfactory lessons included: the generally good relationships between adults and pupils; a clearer structure to the lessons; and a stronger focus on learning, including more emphasis in some lessons on reading. A weaker feature in the satisfactory lessons was the level of sharpness of the match of work to what pupils needed to learn next. This was particularly the case in a mathematics lesson where pupils behaved very well, but the work - plotting football squad data onto a bar chart - was completed relatively easily by the group, who all did the same task. No new learning took place. In the unsatisfactory lesson, on personal, social and health education, the teaching did not engage pupils at all and they very quickly became disruptive, refusing to participate. The objective of the lesson was not clear; it was also unclear how the activities fitted into a cohesive scheme to develop pupils' insight, understanding and knowledge. In contrast, the sharpest teaching was seen in a chemistry lesson on elements, compounds and the filtration process.

The science curriculum is organised into short, blocked units of work on various topics. At the start of each block pupils are assessed on that particular topic and this gives the teacher, a science specialist, a clearer picture of their attainment, both within each unit specifically and across the subject as a whole. The targets given for pupils to work towards are linked to the science units of work and are therefore more specific. The data provided by this system show that some pupils are making good progress within units of work. In contrast, the provision for English and mathematics is currently not as tightly organised and, in both cases, the subjects are led by very highly motivated but non-specialist teachers.

Pupils, generally, remain reluctant to write, preferring practical tasks to written ones. This reflects the very low levels of writing skills that most of them have, even those with reading ages of 14 years or so. As a matter of urgency the unit needs to develop a programme to raise the levels of attainment in writing, that will allow pupils to slot back into award-bearing courses and training once they leave.

Judgement

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

- improve teaching so that work set for pupils is more effectively matched to their individual needs and abilities - satisfactory progress
- improve assessment of pupils' work and progress so that pupils are better informed of what they need to do to improve their achievement - inadequate progress.

Leadership and Management

The centre leader has begun to develop a stronger and more robust role in the overall drive for improvement; but in some aspects this is still at too leisurely a pace. Important decisions that should have been made sooner have not been, such as the extension of the remedial reading programme. However, she has developed links with other agencies and has taken on a lead role in enabling more pupils from the unit to move back into mainstream schools. She has monitored the quality of teaching recently and the records of these sessions, although they appear generous in relation to the quality of teaching seen on this visit, do reflect a range of grades and include points for development.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics, although very well intentioned, lack the subject knowledge to lead the development of these two areas through the next phase.

The structure and composition of the management committee, which has responsibility for the four pupil referral units in the authority, have recently been completely reorganised. The committee's remit and terms of reference have also been reviewed and rewritten. The unit's procedures for reporting to the committee have improved.

Judgement

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

- address weaknesses in leadership and management and governance – satisfactory progress.

External support

The unit continues to receive considerable support from the local authority, especially from the education inclusion service, consultants and school improvement officers, in relation to improving assessment and the quality of teaching. For the foreseeable future, this support will remain necessary to improve the quality of teachers' subject knowledge in English and mathematics and until the unit is in a position to build its own capacity and become self-sustaining.

Main judgements

Progress since being made subject to special measures - satisfactory

Progress since last monitoring visit - satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

1. Embed the whole-school assessment system, ensuring it is consistent across the core subjects, to enable the progress of individual pupils to be tracked effectively.
2. Develop sharp, short units of work in writing and in mathematics, linked to the national strategies and the levels at which pupils are working.
3. Improve teachers' subject knowledge in writing and mathematics; how to assess pupils' understanding in these two areas and how to move them on through the sub-levels of the National Curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State and the Director of Children's Services for Salford.

Yours sincerely

Angela M Westington
H M Inspector