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24 January 2008

Mrs Chris Saye
Headteacher
Phoenix House Pupil Referral Unit
Harold Street
Grimsby
DN32 7NQ

Dear Mrs Saye

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Would you also pass on my thanks to the chair of the management committee and to the students that I met during lessons.

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.

As a result of the inspection in May 2007, the school was asked to:

- **Improve attendance and behaviour**
- **Improve pupils' achievement and standards**
- **Ensure that older pupils can benefit from work-related education**
- **Where possible, reduce the pupils' length of stay.**

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving attendance. The overall rate of attendance for the autumn term 2007 was 80%. While there is room for improvement, this represents a significant rise on the overall rate of 64% at the time of the inspection in May 2007. It is particularly good in Key Stage 2. All pupils are set targets: many have improved their attendance by 10% and some by up to 30%. In almost all cases the rate of attendance is better than when the individual pupil was in mainstream education. This improvement has not been brought about by chance

and the senior leadership is tackling the issue in a number of ways. Key initiatives include: the appointment of a dedicated 'casework' education welfare officer who works with the families of Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils; clear expectations to schools on the importance of attendance within the first six weeks of a placement; a multi-agency approach to support re-engagement of 'hard to reach' pupils; and home tuition as part of a gradual reintegration into the unit. However, the most significant development has been an acknowledgment of the relationship between appropriate curriculum provision, the quality of teaching and attendance. The programme for Key Stage 4 is meeting the needs of the pupils more successfully through the introduction of more work-related learning and the use of Assessment Qualifications Alliance units of accreditation for all optional courses. The recent drive to improve the quality of teaching, by adapting a range of teaching styles in order to motivate and inspire pupils, is making learning more enjoyable. As a result pupils are more willing to attend school.

Progress in improving standards of behaviour is satisfactory. There is a clear link between the impact of initiatives designed to improve the curriculum, teaching and behaviour. There are signs that pupils are more engaged in their learning and are recognising the purpose of what they are doing. When pupils are actively involved in lessons, incidents of poor behaviour decrease. This is enhanced by the thoughtful deployment of teaching assistants, who make a significant contribution to the learning and help to keep pupils on task. The introduction of a consistent, positive, approach to managing behaviour, together with staff training, has resulted in a fall in the number of lessons disrupted by poor behaviour since the previous inspection. All pupils are set behavioural targets which are monitored on a daily basis. This has also helped to reduce the number of incidents of poor behaviour.

As attendance is improving so are achievement and standards; progress in this important area for improvement is satisfactory. In Key Stages 2 and 3 pupils make satisfactory progress and attain their individual targets. The school has good systems to monitor pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science in all key stages. As a consequence, tailored support can be given to those pupils identified as underachieving, as well as to those in need of further challenge. Pupils in Key Stage 4, who were identified as underachieving at the time of the previous inspection, are making better progress in the core subjects although standards remain low. In Key Stage 4, high expectations of teachers and pupils and changes to the content and organisation of the curriculum are beginning to improve pupils' progress. The unit's assessment data suggests that all pupils in the 2008 cohort are on track to attain A* to G grades in GCSE English; in mathematics 75% of pupils are expected to achieve these grades and in science 83%. This is an improvement on 2007, when six pupils passed with grades D to G. Pupils are beginning to experience success and this is developing their self-esteem and confidence.

The appointment of a learner engagement officer to work with a range of work-based learning providers is helping to improve pupils' learning experiences. Pupils now have opportunities to develop key skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as benefiting from accredited courses in construction, catering and hairdressing. At Key Stage 4, pupils are to be involved in a new accredited motor cycle course designed to encourage good riding and maintenance skills. A project is under way that targets vulnerable pupils. It provides educational support, work-based learning and

extended-day provision for 10 young people who spend half of the week at the unit following the National Curriculum and the rest at the Employment Development Service workshops. The progress made by the unit to ensure that older pupils benefit from work-related education is satisfactory. The management team is aware, however, that there is still a need for further work-related experiences.

Satisfactory progress has been made in reducing the length of stay, especially for those pupils with SEN. Pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3, with the exception of those placed for a few weeks before returning to school, are expected to stay at the unit for two terms. In the past, pupils have remained at the unit in excess of this period. Schools and the unit were insufficiently focused on the process of a planned return into mainstream education. There is now greater dialogue between the unit and the school, prior to a pupil taking up a place. Behavioural and academic targets are set that will support reintegration. The unit recognises that they could work more closely with schools in helping teachers manage behaviour better when a pupils returns to them.

The headteacher is providing strong leadership that is focused on driving improvement and in particular on raising achievement. She is very well supported by the Key Stage 4 manager and together they have increased staff accountability and raised the expectations and belief of pupils. The capacity to improve is greater now than at the time the school received a Notice to Improve. The local authority is providing satisfactory support, which is helping the unit to improve.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector