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30 September 2010

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

Dear Mrs Durston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Thurrock Pupil Referral Unit

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 28 and Wednesday 29 September 2010, 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 first 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.

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 (PRU)

Report from the first monitoring inspection on Tuesday 28 and Wednesday 29 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher of the Culver centre, the lead teacher of the Phoenix centre, the chair of the management board and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection Key Stage 2 provision has been relocated to the Phoenix centre. Currently 11 pupils, mostly in Years 5 and 6 but some in Years 3 and 4, attend. Thirty-four Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils attend the Culver centre. Mathematics and information and communication technology are taught by supply teachers. A full review of provision for vulnerable children and young people, including the PRU, is being carried out by the local authority and will inform a new Thurrock Strategy for Inclusion and Special Educational Needs. The outcomes of this review, to be reported in December 2010, will determine the future role of the PRU, its location, numbers of staff and its leaderships and management.

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

In 2010, a larger proportion of pupils sat GCSE examinations and pass rates increased compared with the previous year. Observations of lessons carried out jointly by the headteacher and HMI confirmed that pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 who attend regularly and behave themselves are making sufficient progress. In the primary base, three pupils were entered for national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2010. Results in reading were similar to the national average but were below average in writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress has improved because the new centre provides a positive and welcoming environment in which to learn. Classrooms are vibrant and stimulating. However, pupils' overall progress remains variable because it is dependent on their attendance, which is below average, and their behaviour, which at times is poor.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving attendance due to a number of strategies including first-day calling and through closer liaison with parents and carers. So far this term, over 80% of primary aged pupils and 75% of secondary aged pupils have attended regularly. Senior leaders acknowledge that much closer monitoring is needed to generate further improvement. Pupils' access to full-time education has improved. The majority in Key Stages 2 and 3 now receive 25 hours

tuition at the PRU each week. A small but increasing proportion of pupils are taught both at the PRU and at the schools into which they are being re-integrated.

In the secondary base, most pupils show respect for staff and one another and socialise in a calm, orderly manner. However, the number of pupil exclusions remains high suggesting this may not always be the case. In the primary base, most pupils behave themselves but a few who have severe behavioural and emotional difficulties frequently disrupt their own and others' learning. Behaviour across the PRU is adversely affected by a small proportion of pupils referred to the PRU because there is little alternative specialist provision elsewhere. Senior leaders have little say over the high number of pupils who arrive for 'time-out' from mainstream schools and subsequently spend much of their time in education in the PRU. This has a detrimental effect on attendance and behaviour and presents a major obstacle to improving provision and outcomes at the PRU.

Progress since the last section 5 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

In Key Stages 3 and 4, senior leaders observe lessons periodically, but they focus on teachers' performance management rather than the priorities identified in improvement plans. The curriculum is suitably tailored to the needs of individuals so that they receive a blend of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology lessons, a range of enrichment opportunities and access to learning in the work-place.

Teaching and assessment in the primary base are beginning to show signs of improvement. A revised, thematic curriculum much more suited to the needs and interests of pupils is in place. Medium-term plans require more detail to strengthen teachers' lesson planning. A new template for lesson planning is also in place but information from pupils' statements is not used to plan suitable learning activities for them. New assessment procedures have been introduced this term but more time is needed for them to become embedded. Lesson observations show that teachers talk for too long so pupils are inactive for long periods. Teaching assistants manage pupils' behaviour appropriately but are not fully engaged in supporting their learning. Pupils and staff still do not have access to computers.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve teaching and assessment and ensuring pupils receive their entitlement to a full-time education - satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The uncertainty and staff anxiety caused by the local authority's strategic review, and a lack of coherent external monitoring to gauge the improvements made have meant that few improvements to the leadership and management of the PRU have been made. Senior leaders are unable to clarify leadership roles and lines of management responsibility without clear guidance and support from the local authority. Currently there is no overall leader of the PRU, the secondary base has a headteacher but no deputy headteacher and the primary base operates separately without any senior leaders. A lead teacher has full responsibility for the Phoenix centre and is beginning to generate improvements, but there is little evidence to indicate that capacity to improve is growing. Self-evaluation of the PRU has been updated but does not include sufficient detail about the primary base.

Action plans to tackle the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection are not being monitored well enough by senior leaders or by the local authority. The management committee feel that they are not fully included in improvement planning. Their relations with the local authority are not strong enough to accelerate or sustain improvements within the given timescales. Partnerships with some schools are being strengthened and re-integration rates are improving but too many pupils excluded from mainstream schools end up staying in the PRU for too long.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management by establishing clear roles and responsibilities, and improving monitoring and evaluation – inadequate

External support

The secondary base has received support from a school improvement partner but this has had little impact on improving its effectiveness. Training to improve literacy and numeracy teaching provided by local authority advisers has been well received and the local authority has been instrumental in relocating primary aged pupils onto the new site. Changes in local authority personnel have led to ineffective monitoring of the progress made by the PRU. A request by Ofsted to amend action plans has not been addressed. Milestones set to address some key priorities have not been met. Evaluations of the progress made so far have not been shared with strategic leaders.

Priorities for further improvement

- Gain the full agreement of all partners about the actions needed to improve the PRU and rigorously monitor and evaluate the progress made against the key priorities for improvement identified in the previous inspection

- By the time of the next monitoring inspection visit, articulate a clear, coherent view on the future purpose and functions of the PRU and the roles and responsibilities of its senior leaders.