

Suite 22  
West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231 Direct T 01695 566934  
Maple View Text Phone: 0161 618 8524 Direct F 01695 729320  
Skelmersdale enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Direct email: [hcarnall@cfbt.com](mailto:hcarnall@cfbt.com)  
WN8 9TG [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

24 June 2010

Miss K Kelly  
Acting Headteacher  
The Phoenix Centre  
Eldon Street  
Darlington  
County Durham  
DL3 0NS

Dear Miss Kelly

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Phoenix Centre

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 June 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Darlington local authority.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Phoenix Centre

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 June 2010

## Evidence

The inspector observed the pupil referral unit's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, School Improvement Partner, a group of teaching and support staff, administrative staff, the Chair of the Management Committee and representatives from Darlington local authority.

## Context

The Phoenix Centre supports students in Key Stages 3 and 4 who have a wide range of social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. The vast majority of students have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools and around 70% are boys. The headteacher has been absent on sick leave since the time of the previous inspection. An acting headteacher appointed by the local authority in January 2010. She was previously one of the two deputy headteachers. The local authority's lead officer has devoted additional time to support the school since the inspection; he continues to work closely with the acting headteacher and School Improvement Partner. Additional support has been provided by the regional advisers for behaviour and attendance, and the advisers for English and mathematics. Since the previous inspection, one teacher and one teaching assistant have left the school. There have been no new appointments although plans are in place to increase staff numbers in September.

There are 40 students currently on the roll of the centre. One group of 34 students who are termed 'centre-based' are expected to spend the majority of their time attending lessons at the centre. Another group of six students, all in Key Stage 4, spend most of their time at external training providers. There was no opportunity to visit external providers during this visit.

At the outset of this visit an additional 35 students were listed by the headteacher as being on roll. These students do not attend the centre or its external training providers. During the inspection visit the local authority made it clear that these students were not the responsibility of the Phoenix Centre but fell within the wider remit of the Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) service of the local authority. For example, 15 students are based at the other pupil referral unit in Darlington, five are in the process of being returned to mainstream schools, two are part of the Home Hospital Teaching Service (HHTS) and 13 are in the early stages of assessment.

## Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Most students have a history of low attendance and poor attitudes to learning. As a result, their educational standards are well below average when they join the centre. In the lessons observed, standards remained low for most students. A more robust system to analyse academic progress has been introduced. There are signs that centre-based students' progress in English, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT) is beginning to accelerate. However, a significant minority continue to make inadequate progress due to their poor attendance or poor behaviour. Records show that the six students based at external providers are making at least satisfactory progress in their vocational studies.

## Other relevant outcomes for students

Students' behaviour during the monitoring visit varied significantly between lessons. In some lessons behaviour was very poor. For example, there were several incidents where students swore at staff and each other, ignored staff's instructions and refused to participate in learning. In one case, a student threw objects across the room and left the classroom without permission. In other lessons, students were more compliant and this allowed some satisfactory learning to take place. Students generally get on well with each other around the centre during breaks and lunchtimes. A new monitoring system used at the end of lessons records students' behaviour and provides the basis for teachers to analyse individual improvements to behaviour and reward positive behaviour. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been significantly reduced since the last inspection. However, managers make too great a correlation between this and improvements to behaviour. The reduction in exclusions is also related to the different approach being used to manage poor behaviour.

Data provided by the centre indicate that overall attendance has improved since the last inspection. However, during the two days of the inspection only 15 students attended. Even taking into account those placed with external providers this is a low proportion of those expected to attend. A new and more robust system to monitor attendance has been introduced; attendance registers are taken at the beginning of each day and records are kept both of attendance at the centre and at external placements. Although improving, the overall attendance figures remain low. Plans are in place to improve the attendance of a minority of students who are persistently absent. The centre continues to provide support to other aspects of the EOTAS service with regard to monitoring attendance but at times, this can confuse and complicate the overall evaluation of attendance at the centre.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve outcomes for students by implementing a behaviour strategy which helps them remain in the centre, rewards positive behaviour,

maximises motivation and ensures that they develop skills and attitudes that support their reintegration into mainstream schools – inadequate

### The effectiveness of provision

There is often a mismatch between the individual needs and abilities of students and the tasks they are set by teachers. This was observed during the course of the visit and supported by the centre's own records. Lesson plans are not sufficiently linked to long-term individual goals for students. There is a lack of clarity as to why students with a statement of special educational needs are placed at the centre for long periods and what their targets are. Of the current centre-based students, 18 have attended the centre for two years or more; the learning goals of these students are not clear. The development of teaching and learning has been identified as a key priority by the acting headteacher and extensive professional development work is planned.

A relevant vocational curriculum is provided to Year 11 pupils on vocational placement and this enables them to be well prepared for progression to further education, employment or training. The other centre-based students receive a suitable mix of opportunities, with an appropriate focus on developing functional skills.

The staff–student ratio at the centre is very high, with students often being supported in very small groups or on an individual basis. The quality of care, guidance and support and its impact on individual students is being tracked more robustly. As yet, it is too early to see the impact this new system is having, particularly in relation to improving attendance and behaviour. The centre continues to provide support to other parts of the EOTAS service in relation to the assessment of students who have recently been excluded from mainstream schools.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher, with the support of the local authority, quickly introduced measures to address the high numbers of exclusions identified at the previous inspection. Staff report that this different approach to managing behaviour has had a significant impact on improving the general atmosphere, reducing exclusions and improving attendance. Staff's morale has improved. Previously there was a view that the centre fulfilled a role of simply containing students and was seen by many as the provision of last resort. The acting headteacher has made a good start to bringing about change but acknowledges the scale of the task ahead and agrees that much is still to be done.

The statement of action, developed jointly with the local authority, focuses on key areas for improvement and provides a suitable agenda for change. The centre's development plan sets clear short-term targets for improvement, but does not

identify long-term goals. The centre does not always have straightforward performance indicators to measure outcomes for students. Individual or overall targets for reintegration or progression are not formally set either by the placement panel or the management committee. Therefore, the committee cannot hold the centre to account sufficiently robustly or fully measure the impact of its policies and procedures. Recently, a new shared ambition and vision for the centre has been formulated.

The detailed safeguarding checks meet requirements. Extensive work has been done to ensure that students feel safe in the unit. Security has improved and all staff have received appropriate training. More detailed recording takes place in relation to students' well-being and safety and further work is planned to enhance the physical environment during the summer term. There has been a substantial decrease in the number of false fire alarms activated by students. Although the number of students leaving the premises without permission has been reduced, it remains a key area for improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the centre's effectiveness by ensuring that the headteacher and senior leaders implement a robust system of self-evaluation which helps the centre measure the impact of its actions; provide teachers and other staff with well-targeted guidance and support; implement policies which reflect the centre's ambitions for its students and ensure that all staff, students, and parents and carers are clear as to what is expected of them – inadequate
- Carry out a thorough review of safeguarding arrangements and ensure that all information related to students' well-being and safety is recorded, analysed regularly and accessible to ensure that potential problems are identified at an early stage – satisfactory

#### External support

The local authority has provided satisfactory support to the centre and the statement of action meets requirements. The local authority has been effective in taking immediate action to improve the safeguarding of students. Appropriate levels of support and resources are provided. A number of school improvement personnel and advisers effectively support the work of the acting headteacher. However, the main issue, to identify clearly the remit of the centre and its role within the wider EOTAS service, was only recently resolved and has still to be formalised. This has had a serious impact on the centre's ability to make speedy progress. There is recognition that there is much more to do accelerate the pace of change.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Set challenging targets for all students when they join the centre with clear reference to their long-term goals of reintegration to mainstream education and/or progression to further education or specialist support.
- Improve the attendance and behaviour of students and further reduce the number of students leaving the centre without permission.
- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that the approach and resources teachers use are more closely linked to students' long-term targets.