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Mrs K Rickford
Headteacher
The Forum Centre
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Dear Mrs Rickford

Short inspection of The Forum Centre

Following my visit to the school on 21 October 2015, with Jen Southall, Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the centre was judged to be good in January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Pupils enjoy coming to the centre because of the nurturing environment in which there are not too many pupils and there is plenty of space. Pupils particularly appreciate how well the staff listen to, and care, for them.

The student day starts informally with breakfast club. On entering the kitchen there is a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and an aroma of freshly cooked toast and hot chocolate. The buzz of discussion is the pupils and staff engrossed in social conversation with each other, sharing the previous day's events and what is going to happen today. The homely nutritious food is, for most pupils, their first meal of the day, often following a long taxi ride from home. The orderly and calm start you and your team create enables pupils to be well prepared emotionally and physically for their lessons.

As you know, lessons in the primary phase are fantastic learning experiences. Pupils are helped by staff to think deeply, in particular to extend their use of number and understanding of words. They grow in confidence and learn how to interact with other people in different social situations. This is because the staff have developed strong relationships with the pupils. The pupils see the staff as excellent role models.

Pupils mirror the excellent behaviour they see and consequently try to behave very well. The staff's exceptional knowledge of the pupils means they are able to adapt lesson plans continuously, for example if pupils struggle with a new concept or understand it more quickly than initially anticipated. This ensures that pupils' progress is rapid and they speedily catch up with the learning they have missed in the past. Because the staff carefully show pupils how to improve, they learn how to read more accurately, spell words better and write using appropriate punctuation and grammar. Pupils have opportunities to assess their own work. In mathematics, this helps staff to see how confident pupils feel about their learning, even when they are getting the answers right. The staff then use this information to plan activities to reinforce pupils' confidence and to make sure that their learning, for example in how to manipulate numbers, is secure.

Pupils in the secondary phase generally have good learning experiences. They have specialist teachers for different subjects and can continue with courses that they have already started at previous schools, or start new ones. As with the primary phase, adults are keen for the pupils to do their best and be able to return to mainstream school as soon as possible. You are aware that the quality of teaching and learning is not as exciting or exceptional as that seen in primary classes. You have identified that teachers do not know or understand the pupils' needs as well and their work is not adapted as often as it should be. Nevertheless, pupils gain in confidence and they learn how to control their behaviour, are kept safe and are helped to learn.

You and other centre leaders are ambitious and driven to ensure that the centre provides an excellent service for all those who need it. You have successfully used the last Ofsted inspection report to make important improvements. For example, you have introduced a new system of half-termly target-setting days with parents and pupils. The day of the inspection was one of the target-setting events; parents came to the centre with their children in the afternoon and inspectors were able to hear directly from parents what they thought about your provision and to see how the target setting works. As your own evidence shows, they are incredibly grateful for the work that you and your colleagues do to enable their children to be able to go back into a mainstream school.

The frequency and quality of the monitoring of teaching and learning ensures that senior leaders are able to help teachers improve and secure good learning and progress for pupils. You have appointed an assistant headteacher to support this process. She is acting as a mentor and coach for the new teachers of mathematics and English, which is helping them settle into the centre. She, along with the staff in the primary phase, is able to share a range of outstanding practice with other staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

- All staff at the centre strive to ensure that it provides the optimal conditions for pupils to feel safe and be able to learn. There is a strong collective culture that ensures that the safeguarding of pupils is of paramount importance. The centre

works robustly with other agencies and services to ensure the safety of those in their care even when they are not at the centre.

- All of the safeguarding documents, records, processes and procedures are fit for purpose and successfully implemented.

Inspection findings

- You and your staff have a dogged determination to provide the very best service possible for those young people, and their families, that need to use your centre. You are all highly effective at getting pupils back into full-time education. The centre gives them life-long opportunities to build happy lives and successful careers.
- There is no complacency. Staff are held firmly to account for their teaching. You are aware that teaching and learning in the secondary phase is too variable and not of the same high standard as that in the primary phase. Inconsistencies remain between different subjects. You have rightly identified that teachers' planning in the secondary phase is an area for development. It is not always focused tightly enough on pupils' individual needs and prior attainment, particularly in science and for the most able. In addition, it does not always identify the roles and responsibilities for all adults in the lesson so that they are used to maximise pupils' learning. More also needs to be done to ensure that homework is used to reinforce and extend pupils' learning. These areas are a feature of the centre's action plan. You have provided good-quality support to help raise the quality of teaching and learning in order to resolve these relatively minor weaknesses.
- The newly introduced six-week placements for pupils in Key Stage 3 have been very successful. Pupils have left the centre to go back to mainstream schools and they have stayed there.
- The centre uses pupils' statements of educational needs, or their education, health and care plans, well to match learning activities to pupils' needs. The centre is very effective at quickly getting education, health and care plans into place for those pupils arriving at the centre who need them. This process is sometimes hindered by a lack of information from primary schools and other agencies.
- The centre has provided additional places for three young primary-aged pupils. This is more than it would normally accommodate; the local authority does not have capacity for these pupils to be educated elsewhere. While this is a practical response, and for these pupils and their families a really appreciated respite, you know that such additions are not sustainable in the long term.
- You are aware that there are occasions when drug rehabilitation provision is the ideal solution to help some pupils recover from drug misuse in order for them to be able and ready to start learning again. However, there are no such services locally.
- The centre has a good-quality action plan that focuses on the right areas for improvement, although the centre's funding system does not enable you to derive the financial information necessary to plan sufficiently ahead.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and the management committee should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning in the secondary phase, particularly in science, matches that of the outstanding provision in the primary phase
- they work more robustly with other services, agencies and the local authority to ensure pupils have access to primary provision or specialist services when they need them
- the funding system allows the centre to plan more strategically.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you, other leaders, members of the management committee, and parents. We spoke with pupils during lessons and scrutinised the quality of their work.

We made short visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to their learning and to determine teachers' understanding of pupils' progress. We discussed with staff their understanding of safeguarding procedures.

A wide range of documentary evidence was considered including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum followed, assessment information and the centre's analysis of attendance, behaviour and leavers' destinations.