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Simon Whitney
Headteacher
St Christopher's
St Christopher's Hall
103A Renfrew Road
Ipswich
IP4 3HG

Dear Mr Whitney

No formal designation monitoring inspection of St Christopher's

Following my visit to your unit on Tuesday 22 October 2013, 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 a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

This inspection was prompted, not by any concerns about the unit, but to check on the safety and well-being of new students who had previously attended unregistered provision at Montgomery Road. The unit was given no notice of the inspection.

Evidence

I met with you, the lead teacher at Montgomery Road and a representative from the local authority. I also had a telephone conversation with a member of the management committee. I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding students and child protection arrangements. We toured the accommodation and made a brief visit to facilities on both sites.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The unit's safeguarding arrangements do not meet requirements.

Further improvements are required to the building at the Montgomery Road site to fully ensure pupils' safety and well-being. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors will re-visit the unit in the near future to check that these improvements have been carried out and that pupils are kept safe.

Context

Twelve pupils currently attend St Christopher's. All of them have special educational needs relating to their behavioural and emotional well-being. All are dual registered with mainstream schools. Following amalgamation with Montgomery Road in September 2013, five other pupils with complex special educational needs have joined the unit. To accommodate this and the wider age range, the unit is now registered to admit pupils in Key Stage 4. Previously, the unit was solely for pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Five pupils have a statement of special educational need. Two are in the care of the local authority.

The amalgamation of the two units has been registered with the Department for Education. However, no formal agreement between St Christopher's and the local authority to merge provision has been signed by the management committee. A senior teacher at St Christopher's is on long-term sickness absence. The unit, in partnership with another local pupil referral unit, aims to convert to an academy in January 2014.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff understand the procedures to follow if they have concerns about students and have had training to keep pupils safe. Appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of all staff for working at the unit are recorded in a suitable single central record.

However, the headteacher and the local authority acknowledge that until plans to refurbish the learning environment at Montgomery Road take place, not all requirements for maintaining pupils' safety and well-being are fully met. Significant improvements are still needed to the sanitation, decoration and internal security of the building. Discussions have been held to determine the completion of this work this term, but no starting date has been agreed.

Pupils' behaviour on the St Christopher's site is good. They respond very well to the caring, nurturing environment provided for them. At the Montgomery Road site, pupils' behaviour is much more challenging. Pupils regularly display poor behaviour and two of them have been excluded on more than one occasion this term due to verbal and physical abuse towards each other.

The centre is old and neglected. Poor quality rooms for pupils' learning and socialising do little to foster respect for their environment or for each other. For example, boys and girls are expected to share the same toilet. There are no specialist facilities on site to help them learn well, such as a laboratory or space for

physical education and sport. There are few resources to capture pupils' interest and inspire them to learn. The main access to the centre is secure but doors to classrooms and social areas cannot be locked from the inside to protect pupils from other disruptive pupils. Although pupils are not allowed upstairs, the top floor is untidy due to redecoration and the storage of unwanted furniture.

Currently, pupils taught at Montgomery Road do not have enough regular one-to-one tuition or a full entitlement to learning throughout the week. Staffing levels are too low and this is compounded by some long-term staff absence. Only two staff are on site for the whole day, every day, which does not help pupils or teachers and support staff forge strong working relations. The unit is closed on Monday and Thursday afternoons and currently pupils are offered significantly less than 20 hours of tuition each week. This has a major impact on their regular engagement in learning and is not enabling those with complex social, behavioural and emotional needs to make up for the significant shortfalls in their academic education and their personal skills.

The quality of leadership in and management of the unit

The good leadership of the headteacher noted at the time of the previous inspection ensures that pupils continue to receive a good education at St Christopher's. He has appointed an additional teacher to release himself from his teaching commitment so that he can provide clear strategic management for the whole unit. The lead teacher at Montgomery Road has, in a short space of time put in place a range of procedures to increase the unit's effectiveness. She has not had enough time to thoroughly evaluate the impact of teaching and support on pupils' learning, to fully develop the curriculum or to devise plans to increase pupils' attendance.

Some improvements have been implemented. For example, new information and communication technology hardware has arrived to help pupils learn and to assist senior leaders' administration of the unit. This is very new and has not had time to make a notable impact. Procedures are in place to monitor attendance and behaviour but this is not coordinated centrally to show how well pupils are doing or where further support is needed. The headteacher has not had sufficient time to thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of Montgomery Road or incorporate what needs improving into improvement plans for the whole unit.

External Support

The quality of education provided on the St Christopher's site remains vastly superior to that on the Montgomery Road site because it is well led and its buildings are fit for purpose, and practices and procedures are firmly established. The headteacher and management committee have embraced the request from the local authority to merge provision at Montgomery Road into the unit so that these pupils have a similar good quality education. Currently the local authority is not doing enough to support this merger. The building is not yet fit for purpose.

The local authority makes termly visits to St Christopher's to monitor its effectiveness. This scrutiny has not extended into provision at Montgomery Road.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that arrangements made between the unit and the local authority to refurbish Montgomery Road are completed as a matter of urgency.
- Increase the amount of daily curriculum time offered to promote pupils' learning and welfare at Montgomery Road.
- Establish procedures to evaluate the impact of teachers and support staff on pupils' learning, behaviour and attendance at Montgomery Road.
- Carry out a self-review jointly with the local authority of the standards achieved, the quality of provision and leadership and management at Montgomery Road to determine its effectiveness and identify what needs to be done to improve it.
- Extend termly monitoring procedures by the local authority across all key stages in the unit.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Management Committee. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector