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Mrs Claire George
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Dear Mrs George

Short inspection of The Pupil Referral Service, Peterborough

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 with Jane Crow and Bob Greatrex, Ofsted inspectors, 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 school was judged to be good in December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You show a clear vision for the development of the school and the wider services it provides. Your total commitment to ensuring the safety and welfare of pupils is recognised and valued by pupils, their parents and carers, and the local community. The management committee have total confidence in you, and share your vision for further improvement.

The service has undergone significant changes since the last inspection. This includes appointing new staff, restructuring the leadership of the school's three centres, and relocating one of them to a new site. Throughout this, you have maintained your attention to ensuring that some of the most vulnerable and challenging pupils in the city stay safe, and remain in education.

Behaviour is good. Careful and consistent management of pupils, most of whom display very challenging behaviour, ensures that all three centres are safe, calm and purposeful places in which to learn. Your staff are adept at finding out about the reasons for pupils' poor behaviour, their previous experiences and their backgrounds. Specialist staff work with pupils to modify their behaviour, often before they are excluded from their mainstream school, to keep them in learning.

Behaviour management is firmly based on excellent relations fostered with pupils. When faced with challenging situations, staff calmly and fairly point out to pupils

what the expectations of them are. Pupils told inspectors that, 'This is a school that cares about you', and that, 'Staff talk to us in a nice way and treat us with respect'. Older pupils understand the procedures if they are late for school. They feel that the risk of detentions for lateness encourages them to get to school on time.

Teaching is good. Teachers and support staff are organised, experienced in managing challenging behaviour and forge excellent relations with pupils. Teaching in small groups and on a one-to-one basis is greatly appreciated by pupils, many of whom felt lost in their mainstream school classes and unable to cope. Staff provide pupils with good-quality verbal feedback about their work. Written feedback is not done consistently in line with the school's agreed policy.

You personalise the curriculum to suit pupils' prior learning, interests and different backgrounds. All pupils are assessed on entry to the school to gauge their prior achievement, their personal needs and their welfare. Basic targets are set, initially to make pupils feel safe and get them prepared for learning, to raise their attendance, then to improve their academic progress.

The academic curriculum taught every morning is focused on developing pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy, life-skills and increasing their understanding of the wider world. Limited access to good-quality information technology (IT) limits the development of their computing skills. The curriculum is enhanced by a modest range of vocational courses, off-site learning and enrichment activities each afternoon.

Leaders show a growing understanding of their roles in raising achievement. They are demonstrating they have the capacity to improve the school. Responsibility for leading improvements across the three centres and the extended services provided by the school is shared widely; expectations of staff to develop provision and monitor behaviour and attendance are high. Currently, centre leaders play a minor role in monitoring the quality of teaching.

Limited IT facilities across all three centres means that leaders' monitoring procedures remain underdeveloped. They are unable to monitor and analyse systematically the academic progress of pupils from their entry into, and exit from, the school. You collate a range of assessment information for pupils in Year 11; information about the progress made by pupils in other year groups is less well developed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You maintain a single central record of all employees at the school's main site. Staff are employed directly by Peterborough City Council. The Council takes overall responsibility for ensuring that the necessary checks of adults are made before they can work with children.

Child protection arrangements are robust. A team of experienced and effective staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of all safeguarding matters. Detailed records

are maintained of the actions taken and the procedures followed in the event of a disclosure or concerns raised.

The integrated services provided for local schools and families are well organised and highly valued by all stakeholders. Leaders have the capacity to intervene early when pupils are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream school. The school 'hosts' younger pupils at risk of exclusion for short periods to help them to modify their behaviour. School leaders oversee pupils' managed moves from schools to other providers.

Support staff liaise effectively with parents and carers as new pupils join the school, or when families face a crisis that affects pupils' safety and well-being. This 'wrap-around' care underpins your ethos and approach to protecting pupils from harm, and keeping them engaged in their education.

Inspection findings

- Pupils join the school at different times of the year due to their exclusion from their mainstream school, their return to education or recent arrival in the city. Some remain on part-time timetables as they re-integrate back into learning, or cannot attend regularly due to their personal and health needs.
- Primary-aged pupils receive intensive support and care to help them settle into their new surroundings. Clear expectations, shorter lessons and one-to-one support from caring staff ensure that their social and emotional needs are met, enabling them to re-engage in learning. Pupils understand that they will lose choice-time if they misbehave, and also that they can earn back lost time if their behaviour improves.
- Pupils in key stage 3 display the most challenging behaviour. Inspectors found that the silly, immature behaviour displayed in informal sessions was not replicated in lessons. Good teaching, lots of praise and high-quality care helps to capture and retain pupils' interest. Teachers and support staff manage behaviour very well, and do not let it spoil the learning of others.
- Inspectors agree with older pupils that behaviour in key stage 4 is good. They say school is a safe and friendly place to be. A small minority of pupils who struggle to mix well and learn alongside others receive intensive, one-to-one support in the Honeyhill Centre to ensure that they remain in learning and acquire basic qualifications. Year 10 and 11 boys praised the school, saying that it 'has helped them to move on and learn again, because staff care for you'.
- Innovative approaches to meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils are working successfully. Older girls who have missed long periods of schooling, have mental health issues or are at risk of harm are taught and cared for together on the same site in the 'Gems' group. The curriculum is matched to their personal needs and interests, enabling them to study Level 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy awards, and pursue their vocational interests in health and beauty, hairdressing and childcare. Girls who met with inspectors enthused about what the school does for them, saying, 'This place has really sorted me out, given me the confidence to join in again and allow me to pick my interests.' Once they feel

secure and have re-engaged in learning they take responsibility for organising events, fundraising and listening to younger pupils read.

- Leaders help to place pupils arriving in the city with little or no English into learning. Some of them arrive without any formal education. Pupils are placed in suitable schools or in the pupil referral unit, depending on their needs. Pupils in Year 11 join the school's 'Compass' group. Once they feel safe, they are assessed and grouped together according to their ability. Initially they are taught communication skills, and basic literacy and numeracy. They quickly develop a sense of wanting to learn and acquire further skills. They are taught leadership skills through sport, and practise them by coaching younger pupils in physical education (PE) and competitive sport. The PE and sport premium is used effectively to support this initiative.
- The large majority of key stage 4 pupils leave school having attained a range of Level 1 and 2 awards. A few achieve a range of GCSE qualifications. Pupils choose to gain vocational experience in motor vehicle maintenance, sports coaching or hairdressing. Careers guidance is effective. Most pupils that remain in the service progress into further education, training or employment at the end of Year 11.
- Attendance is below average, but rising. Leaders can point to good examples of pupils that have missed long periods of their schooling, but now attend regularly since joining the school. Effective procedures are in place to reduce persistent absence and monitor the safety and well-being of those who do not attend often enough.
- Pupils are provided with more opportunities to develop their literacy skills. Inspectors noted that in a key stage 2 English lesson, pupils were encouraged to think of more complex nouns, verbs and adjectives to enhance their poetry. In key stage 3, pupils practised their speaking and listening skills in English and in other subjects, including French. Practical activities such as cooking and PE are used well to prompt discussion and question pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Younger pupils have fewer opportunities to develop their writing. Teachers do not encourage them to write at length often enough. Getting pupils to write at length remains a barrier to their overall achievement. More progress has been made with pupils in key stage 4. Pupils are willing to write because they have realised that in order to achieve accredited awards in English and a range of other subjects, they need to write fluently, and at length. Their books show that, increasingly, they are developing their writing in a range of styles. Some of them need further support to improve their handwriting.
- The management committee has overseen effectively the reorganisation of leadership across the three centres, and of the wider support services provided by the school. They have been less effective in ensuring that information on the service's website is kept up to date. Members receive regular updates about the school's development and demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses highlighted in leaders' self-evaluation and development planning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers take every opportunity in lessons to develop the writing skills of primary-aged pupils and pupils in key stage 3
- centre leaders regularly visit lessons to observe teaching and monitor the impact it has on improving pupils' learning
- IT equipment is improved across the three centres to increase pupils' use of computers, and to enable staff to monitor record and analyse assessment information systematically.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, and the director of children's services for Peterborough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, senior and middle leaders, the chair and four other members of the management committee, and four groups of pupils. Together with senior leaders, we observed a small sample of lessons on each of the three sites to see pupils at work. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation and improvement planning, safeguarding including the single central record, and attendance and behaviour records. There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaires from parents or pupils. There was one response to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

The following aspects were discussed in detail:

- the actions taken by senior leaders since the last inspection to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills and writing skills
- the management of behaviour and actions taken to raise attendance
- the quality of teaching and the curriculum provided for pupils
- leaders' monitoring of pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance.