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Mrs Emma Hickerson
Headteacher
Rise Carr College
Eldon Street
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Dear Mrs Hickerson

Short inspection of Rise Carr College

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 2018 with Michael Wardle, Her Majesty's Inspector, and George Gilmore, Ofsted 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 your school was judged to be good in October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Members of the management committee (the governors) are ambitious for the pupils and the school. They have overseen the home and hospital teaching service (HHTS) and the pupil referral unit (PRU) successfully during a time of great change. This includes the creation of Clifton House, a key stage 3 short-stay, early intervention provision for pupils who need extra support to succeed in mainstream education. This provision is based at a local secondary school.

Since taking up the post of headteacher in September 2016, you have taken assertive action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the PRU. The appointment of a new coordinator for special educational needs (SENCo), in November of the same year, is paying dividends. The pupils in your PRU now have access to a greater number of support services. Your teachers and teaching assistants have a better understanding of pupils' underlying needs. The new SENCo is bringing current research and new practices into the PRU successfully. You have also strengthened the provision for mathematics through a new addition to the staff. As a result, current pupils are making better progress. This was an area for development at the time of the PRU's last inspection.

Over time, pupils have attended the PRU more often than they attended their mainstream secondary schools. However, following the recent admittance of an unprecedented number of pupils permanently excluded from secondary schools within Darlington local authority, pupils' attendance overall is declining. Ensuring pupils are in school more often is, quite correctly, your key priority.

You have created a calm environment for learning. Your pupils, many of whom have social, emotional and mental health needs, generally behave well on site. However, you acknowledge that the number of incidences of swearing is unacceptably high.

Quite rightly, your plans to improve the PRU include the development of pupils' reading in key stages 3 and 4. You have recently implemented a new reading scheme. This has engaged pupils' interest. They enjoy the competitive nature of the scheme and more are 'buying in' to reading. You have identified that the next step is to address the needs of some of the youngest pupils in key stage 3, as they do not have sufficient phonological knowledge to read words fluently.

Leaders have maintained a large adult-to-pupil ratio in the PRU to ensure pupils are supported to make good progress. Pupils' learning logs are completed with them individually at the end of every lesson. As a result, your pupils know what they have learned, what they have done well and what they need to do next. Teachers and teaching assistants tailor the provision for individual pupils well.

Members of the management committee, including two officers from Darlington local authority, oversee the HHTS conscientiously and well. The head of the HHTS ensures that pupils achieve good outcomes from their individual starting points. As in the PRU, teachers and teaching assistants provide learning activities for pupils that are matched well to their individual needs. As a result, all are very well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding carries out stringent checks of the quality of safeguarding in the PRU and the HHTS on a regular basis. Through this work, the governors know that pupils, many of whom have a history of poor attendance at their secondary schools, need to attend the provisions more often.

Leaders ensure that each pupil's secondary school is informed immediately of any child protection and safeguarding concerns that arise. Communication is a strength of the practice of the PRU and the HHTS. This communication leads to successful work with a host of external agencies, including the child and adolescent mental health service.

You and the head of the HHTS have made sure that all staff are very well trained to keep pupils safe in education. For example, all staff fully understand the need to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism.

The staff in the PRU have great expertise in de-escalating pupils' more extreme behaviours. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to express their views. Consequently, incidents of staff having to restrain pupils are few and far between. The very small number of restraints is recorded appropriately in the PRU's 'bound book'. Pupils told members of the team that you and your staff support them well. They have noticed that there are very few incidents of bullying and any that do occur are dealt with thoroughly. Pastoral support is strong in the PRU.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' attendance at the PRU is currently 10% lower than in previous academic years. This is due to a recent dramatic increase in the number of pupils who have been permanently excluded from secondary schools within Darlington local authority on the PRU's roll. Previously, there was a zero-exclusion protocol across secondary schools in the borough. All leaders, including from the local authority, recognise that these pupils must attend more regularly if they are to make the most of the educational opportunities on offer.
- Leaders in the PRU have taken strong action to improve the quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' progress in reading. The addition of a teacher with particular expertise in key stage 2 is proving beneficial. More pupils in Years 7 and 8 are making better progress in reading than at the time of the last inspection. However, there is further work to be done to ensure all pupils have the secure knowledge of phonics required to read, understand and enjoy age-appropriate texts.
- The PRU's assessment information tracking system correctly shows that more than half of the pupils are making good progress in mathematics from their individual starting points at the end of key stage 2. A new teacher for mathematics, together with staff training, has revitalised the provision. Teachers and teaching assistants ask insightful questions of their pupils. Pupils are encouraged to give reasoned replies confidently. Pupils' progress in mathematics continues to improve.
- The quality of work in the pupils' workbooks in key stage 4 at the HHTS is very good. Pupils respond well to their teachers' advice. They are aware of the progress they are making in all subjects because they understand their individual 'flight paths'. Pupils are delighted when a 'flight path' shows that they have made sharper progress.
- Governors ensure that careers information, advice and guidance are very good in the PRU and HHTS. There are very strong outcomes in terms of pupils' destinations. Over time, every leaver has gone on to further education, training or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to the PRU's provision for reading are sustained and the provision for pupils with very low on-entry reading ages is improved further to ensure they catch up quickly
- leaders work in partnership with secondary schools and the local authority to increase the attendance of pupils on transition into the PRU following permanent exclusion
- pupils understand that swearing, as a matter of course in everyday conversation, is inappropriate and unacceptable.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Members of the inspection team discussed the work of the school with you, the SENCo, teachers and teaching assistants. I met with three current members and one former member of the management committee. A range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, was checked. Inspectors examined information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievements, both academically and behaviourally. I considered the school's own surveys of the views of pupils, parents and staff. Members of the inspection team visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to check the progress made by pupils in their workbooks. An inspector read with pupils in Year 7. Inspectors talked formally to a group of pupils from Years 7, 9 and 11, and talked more informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktimes about their learning. In addition, an inspector talked with the head of the HHTS. The inspector checked the attendance, destinations and academic progress of the pupils who access the service currently.