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Mrs H Salmon
The Acting Principal
Tavistock College
Crowndale Road
Tavistock
Devon
PL19 8DD

Dear Mrs Salmon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Tavistock College

Following my visit with two additional inspectors to your school on 1 and 2 December 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 second 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010.

- Raise achievement by improving provision, including:
 - the quality of teaching and the use of assessment data to inform planning, to accelerate the rate at which students make progress
 - broadening the curriculum, to ensure that it meets the needs of all students
 - focusing on meeting the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented.

- Ensure that the leadership and management of the college develop the capacity to improve achievement by:
 - developing a regular, rigorous and inclusive system to analyse data accurately and measure the impact of actions taken so that planning is formalised, focused on appropriate priorities and involves the whole college community
 - ensuring that they fully acknowledge the weaknesses in provision and outcomes and that more robust and accurate evaluation leads swiftly to remedial action.

- Ensure statutory requirements relating to equalities are met by:
 - ensuring that the college has up-to-date, agreed policies
 - ensuring that systems are in place to review these policies regularly, monitor their implementation and assess their impact on staff, learners, parents and carers.

- Ensure a more effective contribution to promoting community cohesion.

Special measures: monitoring of Tavistock College

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work including 19 lessons, scrutinised documents, met with the acting principal and a range of staff, a representative group of students, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and the college's Improvement Partner.

Context

The acting principal and acting vice-principal in post during the last monitoring visit left the college, as arranged, at the end of the summer term and returned to their home school. The college has been led since September by an experienced headteacher from St James School in Exeter, who has recently been appointed to the position of principal of the college from January 2011. A new assistant principal has joined the college and a vice-principal has been seconded to the college for a year.

The number of students on roll at the college has fallen slightly since the last monitoring inspection.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The percentage of Year 11 students attaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics fell for the second year in a row in 2010. This measure was significantly below the national average, below the college's target and below the prediction given to the inspection team during the last monitoring visit. Boys' achievement was below that of girls, particularly in English, and lower-ability students made less progress than their middle- and upper-ability peers. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities was well below expected levels. Significant variation in the achievement of students between subjects was also evident in these results. For example, attainment rose in mathematics and was broadly similar to the national average, with students' progress in this subject being satisfactory, while attainment fell in English and was significantly below average. The achievement of students in modern foreign languages, the college's specialist subjects, was also below expectation, particularly on short-course GCSEs.

The acting principal, with the support of the new senior leadership team, has responded promptly and robustly to the issues identified by these results. Progress has been made in improving the accuracy of teacher assessments so that predictions of future examination performance are becoming more reliable. Student tracking procedures also continue to develop well. Assessments are carried out every four

weeks in Years 10 and 11 and underachieving students are more quickly identified than was the case last year. A range of effective interventions are in place to support students' progress, particularly in Year 11. Senior leaders have rightly identified the need to extend the range of interventions for students in Years 7 to 10.

Lesson observations indicate that the progress made by students is steadily improving and the college's tracking data indicate that current Year 11 students will attain higher levels of attainment than the previous Year 11. However, variation in achievement between subjects remains an issue and, although the progress made by lower-ability students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving, it remains below that of their peers.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The large majority of students continue to behave well in lessons. When teaching is lively and interesting, students respond well, but when activities fail to engage them, some students, particularly boys, can become involved in low-level disruptive behaviour. Students report that behaviour is continuing to improve and staff are becoming more consistent in their application of the college's behaviour policy, although some inconsistency still remains. As during the last monitoring visit, teachers are continuing to challenge students to take greater responsibility for their own learning through the use of activities that require more independent work. Although the success of these activities is improving, it remains variable as not all students have yet fully taken on board their responsibility for the learning process. Students' behaviour around the school site is satisfactory, although behaviour in corridors and in social areas can sometimes be lively. Expectations of students' uniform are not yet consistently high across the college.

The falling trend in fixed-term exclusions reported in the previous monitoring letter has continued. Fixed-term exclusions so far this academic year are below those seen during the corresponding period last year. Attendance improved in the last academic year, although it remained similar to the national average. This trend of improving attendance has continued since the start of this academic year. The percentage of students who are persistently absent from school has declined and is now below average.

The effectiveness of provision

Although some progress has been made in improving teaching since the last monitoring inspection, the variation in practice across the college still remains too great. Good teaching tends to be located in particular departments rather than spread evenly across the college. This is why progress is better in some subjects than others. This variation is slowly reducing, although the leadership team rightly acknowledges that the pace of improvement needs to accelerate. The expectations

of good teaching have been made clear to staff through a recently devised good lesson guide. Teaching is also being monitored regularly and robustly by senior leaders. As during the previous monitoring inspection, joint lesson observations carried out with senior leaders supported the accuracy of their judgements. Most middle leaders have received effective training on lesson observation and are also involved in observing lessons. Staff welcome the range of training and professional development opportunities that have been put in place to improve their practice and these are beginning to prove effective.

A good, new lesson planning form that has a clear focus on students' learning is being consistently used by all staff. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. There are good relationships between staff and students, with teachers making effective use of praise and encouragement. A range of effective tasks, pitched at an appropriate level for students in the class, are used by teachers to actively involve students in their learning. However, in the less effective lessons, teachers' expectations are not high enough and the pace of learning is too slow. In these lessons, tasks do not sufficiently engage students and actively involve them in learning. The quality of marking has improved since the last monitoring inspection. Written feedback was observed that gives students' helpful and clear advice about how to improve their work, and students stated that they found this helped their learning. However, some inconsistency in the quality of marking remains.

The curriculum has continued to be developed well since the last monitoring inspection. The vocational-based courses introduced for Year 10 in September 2010 means that the curriculum better meets the needs and interests of all students. Good plans are in place to further develop the curriculum in the future. This includes working with a range of partners such as local businesses and work-based learning providers. These plans have been well thought through and the introduction of new courses is to be phased in over a sensible period of time. The college is about to introduce a sensible change to the school day. This will mean one mid-morning and one lunch break at the same time for all students. This will make timetabling and the creation of more ability groups easier to manage.

Turbulence in the leadership and management of provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has had some impact on progress in this area. However, an acting special educational needs coordinator is now rapidly driving improvement. The action plan produced as a result of a robust review of provision is being implemented well. For example, clear procedures are now in place to track the progress of those students at school action and school action plus. Despite improvements to the way teaching assistants support students, they are not always deployed in the most effective way to improve students' learning. Senior leaders are taking sensible steps to address this issue.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise achievement by improving provision – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The governors have been successful in appointing an experienced principal to lead the college in its next stage of development. She in turn has sensibly strengthened and extended the senior leadership team. They are working well together to further develop the capacity of leadership and management in the school. As a result, despite considerable change to the senior leadership of the college since the last monitoring inspection, a clear focus has been maintained on addressing the issues raised by the previous Ofsted inspection. Senior leaders have a clear and accurate view of the college's strengths and weaknesses, and the development plan has been revised and addresses the areas in need of improvement well.

Line management arrangements for middle leaders have been strengthened and they are being held increasingly accountable for students' progress. For example, for the first time, all heads of subject have completed a detailed evaluation of Year 11 students' achievement in the summer examinations. Middle leaders' skills of monitoring and evaluation are improving and each head of subject is currently producing a detailed evaluation of provision and outcomes in their subject area. However, the impact of specific interventions is not yet being consistently evaluated. Robust and rigorous action is being taken by senior leaders to reduce the percentage of inadequate teaching in the school and address the issues in underperforming departments. However, the impact of actions is only just beginning to be seen.

The governing body is monitoring the college's progress well and becoming increasingly challenging in terms of the information it requires in order to evaluate the college's performance. It has a clear and accurate understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses.

The governing body, in partnership with senior leaders, has worked effectively to ensure that all statutory policies are in place and appropriate procedures have been introduced to monitor the effectiveness of these policies. The process of monitoring the impact of policies is developing satisfactorily. A coherent and manageable policy to promote and develop community cohesion is in place. The action plan to promote community cohesion is based on a thorough audit. There is some evidence of impact in developing students' understanding of the diversity of faiths, ethnicities and cultures found in the United Kingdom through links with a multicultural school in London. However, senior leaders rightly recognise this remains an area for development.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- ensure the leadership and management of the college develop the capacity to improve achievement – satisfactory
- ensure statutory requirements related to equalities are met – satisfactory

- ensure a more effective contribution to promoting community cohesion – satisfactory.

External support

There are good, positive relations between the college and local authority, and they continue to work well together to improve provision and outcomes in the college. The local authority has good arrangements to monitor the implementation and impact of actions outlined in the college's improvement plan. The college's Improvement Partner continues to effectively coordinate support for the college. For example, since the last monitoring inspection, effective support has been provided for leadership and management, teaching and learning, and special educational needs provision.