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Mrs H Salmon
The 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 college on 30 and 31 March 2011, 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 third 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 30 and 31 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work including 21 lessons, undertook a learning walk with the principal briefly visiting 6 lessons and also scrutinised documents. They also met with the principal and a range of staff, a representative group of students, two governors including the chair of governors, and the college's improvement partner.

Context

An assistant principal has left the college since the last monitoring inspection. Two senior members of staff have joined the college on secondment from local schools. One is in the college for half the week, while the other is full time. The special educational needs coordinator has left the college and has been temporarily replaced until the end of this academic year by an experienced coordinator. Five teaching members of staff have also left the college. Two governors have left the governing body and one new governor has been appointed.

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

The previous monitoring inspection judged that teachers' assessments were becoming more accurate. This judgement is supported by the recent results attained by Year 11 students taking GCSE English examinations in November. Students attained results very close to the college's predictions. Around 70% of all Year 11 students attained a GCSE grade C or above in English language. This is already above the results attained by Year 11 students taking examinations in 2010, with some students able to further improve their grades by re-taking examinations in June. These results indicate that girls' achievement in English continues to be better than boys, but this gap in achievement is closing.

The process of tracking students' progress towards challenging targets continues to develop well. Those students who are underachieving, particularly those at the boundary between GCSE grades C and D, are quickly identified. A range of interventions are in place to support these students and they are beginning to have a positive impact on their progress. College tracking data indicate that students' progress is improving and Year 11 students will attain better examination results than the Year 11 in 2010. However, Year 11 students are not on track to attain the college's statutory end of Key Stage 4 targets. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving although remains below that of their peers. The variation in achievement between subjects reported in the previous monitoring inspection remains, although is beginning to reduce. However,

senior leaders are aware of the need to improve students' progress in mathematics, science, food technology and textiles.

The college inspection conducted in January 2010 identified that sixth form students were making good progress in their learning. Recently-published value-added data for Year 12 and Year 13 students taking examinations in June 2010 indicate that this remains the case.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

There has been some improvement in students' behaviour since the previous monitoring inspection. Teachers are becoming more consistent in their application of the college's new behaviour policy and monitoring data indicate there have been fewer incidents of poor behaviour. 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. However, students, particularly those in Year 11, report that their lessons are occasionally disturbed by the low-level disruptive behaviour of a few students. Inspectors also observed some disruptive behaviour affecting learning in a small minority of lessons.

Students continue to report that they feel safe and that there is a friendly atmosphere in the college. Systems to reward good attendance have been strengthened and the improving trend in attendance reported in the previous monitoring letter has continued. Despite this rise, attendance remains similar to the national average. The percentage of students who are persistently absent from college has increased.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is continuing to steadily improve. The creation of teaching and learning working groups, through which staff can share and develop expertise, are beginning to prove effective. The proportion of lessons in which teaching is good or better has improved and is in line with the interim target set in the college's and local authority's plan for improvement. The senior leadership team has taken robust and successful action to reduce the proportion of inadequate teaching, but too much still remains. Teaching is being regularly monitored and helpful feedback is being given to staff about how to improve their practice. However, the judgements being reached on the quality of teaching by middle leaders are at times over generous.

There has been an improvement in the quality of teachers' lesson planning since the last monitoring inspection and more opportunities are being provided for students to be actively involved in their learning. Relationships between teachers and students remain good in lessons. There has been some improvement in how well teachers are matching activities to the ability and learning needs of students, and much good

practice was seen. However, this good practice is not yet firmly embedded across the college. Similarly, in the weaker lessons seen during this inspection, the expectations of teachers were not high enough and lessons proceeded at too slow a pace.

Students are provided with clear information about their targets and they are generally aware of how well they are doing. However, they are less clear about what they need to do to improve. The quality of marking and verbal feedback to students remains inconsistent across the college. Some very good practice was observed during this inspection, with students being given clear and helpful advice about how to improve with this being linked to grades or levels. Students reported that they found the use of 'learning ladders' particularly helpful. However, this good practice is not consistently in place across the college.

Some good, planned improvements have been made to the curriculum since the previous monitoring inspection. The college has taken note of the views and interests of current Year 9 students to design an engaging Key Stage 4 curriculum from September 2011. The new planned curriculum includes a range of both academic and vocational courses to better meet the needs and aspirations of students. Additional sessions at the end of the college day are also planned and will enable students to further broaden their learning. The college has also begun to improve its relationship with employers and to raise expectations across departments about better preparing students for the world of work. The college has sensibly redesigned the structure of the school day since the previous monitoring inspection. There is now just one mid-day break and this has brought greater coherence to the school timetable. The students spoken to welcomed this change.

The acting special educational needs coordinator continues to implement the action plan to improve provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. However, past turbulence in leadership and management of provision for this group of students means that slower than expected progress has been made in this area. Although, there has been some improvement in the progress being made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, tracking indicates that they are still attaining well below their targets. Senior leaders have led a sensible restructuring of teaching assistant support within the college and this is just beginning to have a positive impact on students' progress.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise achievement by improving provision – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal, with the effective support of senior leaders, is providing the school with clear and effective leadership. The leadership team has been strengthened since the previous monitoring inspection by the addition of two new senior leaders. Although some of the leadership team posts are of a temporary nature, those

appointed to them are energetic and committed to driving improvement. The principal has a good plan to establish a more stable leadership team with two permanent vice-principal posts to be established in the near future.

The college has comprehensive procedures in place to collect and analyse students' assessment data. The data are being used effectively to hold middle leaders to account for students' progress through regular line management meetings. However, not all heads of department are making effective use of this data to track students' progress and intervene where appropriate. The monitoring and evaluation skills of middle leaders are being sensibly developed and all have produced a departmental self-evaluation document since the previous inspection. Although, there is variation in the quality of these documents, effective strategies to share and develop good practice are beginning to ensure a greater level of consistency.

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. This plan continues to be implemented well. 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 and senior leaders are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all students. They have ensured that appropriate procedures have been introduced to monitor the effectiveness of the new policies relating to equalities. They rightly recognise the need to ensure that all policies and practice are rigorously monitored and developed to continue to close the gap in achievement between different groups of students. The action plan to promote community cohesion is based on a thorough audit. This plan is being satisfactorily implemented. There is evidence of students' developing understanding of a diversity of faiths, ethnicities and cultures through links with countries such as Japan and Uganda and through links with a multicultural school in London.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- ensure the leadership and management of the college develop the capacity to improve achievement – good
- ensure statutory requirements related to equalities are met – satisfactory
- ensure a more effective contribution to promoting community cohesion – satisfactory.

External support

Good, positive relations between the college and local authority remain and they continue to work well together to improve provision and outcomes in the college. The local authority monitors the implementation and impact of actions in the college's improvement plan well through the action plan monitoring committee and

through regular college reviews. Since the previous monitoring inspection, effective support has been provided for leadership and management, teaching and learning and special educational needs provision.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all written and verbal advice given to students is of high quality and clearly identifies the next steps in their learning.