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16 June 2011

Mr A Kuchartschuk
Headteacher
West Craven High Technology College
Kelbrook Road
Barnoldswick
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Kuchartschuk,

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of West Craven High Technology College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 June 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, local authority representatives, staff and, of course, the students who spoke with me while I was in school.

Since the time of the previous inspection, the acting head of English has been confirmed as a permanent appointment and two temporary assistant year manager posts have been created. The number of students at the school has risen slightly, although numbers joining Year 7 are falling due to changes in local demographics.

As a result of the inspection on 20 October 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Senior leaders are demonstrating a greater drive and urgency for improvement. Leadership responsibility has been extended more widely and, as a result, capacity for further improvement is not overly reliant on a small number of key personnel. Planning is sharply focused on outcomes for students, has clear milestones and an appropriate range of success criteria. Progress is regularly reviewed and plans and actions adapted as needed. As a result, some aspects of provision have been strengthened. The overall quality of teaching and learning is improving. Informed by the much-enhanced use of assessment information, there is a relentless and effective focus on the progress of individual students, particularly those in Year 11. The use of a strategy of early-entry examinations in key subjects has been effective in targeting support more appropriately once results are known. As a result of these improvements, students' achievement is rising, most notably in Year 11. The school's own robust tracking of students' progress indicates that the proportion of students on track

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to secure five or more good grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, will exceed the school's own challenging targets and those targets that are linked to the specialist status of technology. Inspection evidence also confirms that the differences in achievement between boys and girls, and for those students known to be eligible for free school meals, are reducing.

Lines of accountability between senior and middle leaders have been clarified and strengthened. Middle leaders understand their roles and responsibilities well and clear procedures are now in place to monitor the effectiveness of teaching. There is regular dialogue about the progress of individual students and the annual review of each department is helping to identify and drive improvement across subject areas. However, while the monitoring of students' progress is an increasingly consistent feature of the work of middle leaders, there remains considerable variability in their effectiveness in driving improvements in teaching and learning. For example, teachers' planning usually identifies graduated learning outcomes for different ability groups within a lesson. However, planning does not indicate consistently how tasks and activities will be explicitly adapted to meet the varying needs of students in the class. Similarly, while lesson-planning usually identifies a sufficient range and variety of activities to interest and engage them, students are not always clear about what they are learning and why.

Approaches to promote improved attendance have been concerted and effective. As a result, the school exactly met the target for overall attendance identified in the previous inspection report and has brought about a reduction of 2.6% in levels of persistent absence compared with the same period last year. However, both overall absence and persistent absence remain above the national average and the average for schools in similar contexts. The school has correctly identified that more work needs to be done to analyse absence by different groups of students and to target further actions accordingly.

The school has worked hard to survey and respond to students' views in relation to the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The options available in the school canteen are generally appreciated by students and greater numbers now access what is on offer. Students enjoy the wider range of activities that they can access at lunchtimes. Following a wide consultation with parents and carers, staff and students, now only those students in the oldest year group in school receive the 'off-site' privilege for lunch. The space available for students to be with their friends in school at social times has been extended and ambitious plans are in place to develop this further. The work of the 'food group' ensures that the views of students are brought to the attention of senior leaders, the governing body and representatives from the catering services. The school's smoking cessation programme has met with some success with a small number of students. Students recognise where the school has implemented actions in response to their requests and concerns. However, although they hold strong views about the quality of teaching and learning, they report that their views are less frequently sought in this regard.

Students' behaviour around the school site is calm and orderly and they respond well in lessons, particularly when asked to work together in pairs or small groups. The number of

fixed-term exclusions has fallen sharply and the incidence of repeat exclusion is rare. This is because the school works hard to explore alternatives to exclusion before this sanction is used. The school's record-keeping in relation to safeguarding meets statutory requirements.

Specialist status makes a valuable contribution in the use of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning across the school. The school is on track to secure improved outcomes in 2011 for students across a range of technology courses and the weaknesses in teaching in some aspects of design and technology have been addressed successfully.

The school receives a good level of support from local authority advisers and consultants, although the level of this support is being reduced in recognition of the school's own increased capacity to improve. Valuable support has also been provided through the school's partnership with another secondary school in the authority, particularly in relation to developments in leadership and management and in the use of assessment information. The local authority's statement of action was evaluated and found to meet requirements.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mr Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 20 October 2010

- Improve the development of pupils' workplace and other skills by raising attendance levels to at least 93% by summer 2011 and reducing persistent absence.
- Improve the support for pupils to lead healthy lifestyles by:
 - encouraging greater numbers to take advantage of the healthy options available in the school canteen
 - improving the facilities for pupils to socialise at lunchtimes on the premises so they want to stay in school.
- Ensure good or better progress in lessons by:
 - improving the way teachers use a range of activities, tasks and approaches in their lessons to meet the individual needs of the pupils
 - strengthening systems to monitor and evaluate lessons in order to reduce the variability in the quality of teaching between and within subjects.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - providing clear strategic direction and increasing the drive and urgency with which improvements are made
 - taking more account of the views of stakeholders, particularly in relation to outcomes for pupils other than their academic achievement.