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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 7 and 8 July 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 fourth 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work including 23 lessons, undertook a learning walk with the principal, briefly visiting eight lessons, and also scrutinised documents. They also met with the principal and a range of staff, a representative group of students, two members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the college has appointed two permanent vice principals and two assistant principals. 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 college's tracking data and inspection evidence indicate that the two year decline in attainment at the end of Year 11 has been reversed. Attainment is rising, and evidence indicates that the percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics will be well above the figure attained last year. However, the college's target for this measure is unlikely to be reached. The difference in achievement between boys and girls is beginning to close, although boys' achievement is still below that of girls, particularly in current Year 10. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving but remains well below expected levels. The progress made by students between subjects is also beginning to close but differences still remain. Achievement in science remains below expected levels.

Tracking data provided by the college indicate that students in the sixth form continue to achieve well.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students report that behaviour continues to improve but that a few lessons are disrupted by a very small number of students who misbehave. Students behaved well in the large majority of lessons observed during this inspection. The percentage of fixed term exclusions continues to fall and is evidence of improving behaviour. Students report that they continue to feel safe around the college. They also welcome the fact that their views are being increasingly sought and responded to. Attendance has fallen since the last monitoring inspection, mainly due to the attendance of some Year 11 students. However, overall attendance remains slightly higher than was the case this time last year.

The effectiveness of provision

Improvements in teaching are being driven by the effective linking of lesson monitoring with professional development opportunities for teachers. Robust action taken since the last monitoring inspection has led to a reduction in the percentage of inadequate teaching in the school. The challenge for the college is now to move a greater percentage of satisfactory teaching to good. The quality of lesson planning has improved since the last monitoring inspection. Teachers are now making more effective use of data on students' prior attainment to plan lessons that better meet their needs. However, variation in the quality of this planning across the college still remains. A greater range of opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning is also now being provided. A common strength of the lessons observed was the quality of the relationships between staff and student and this is an improving feature of the college. Sixth form students, in particular, were very appreciative of the extra support given to them outside of lessons. In the weaker lessons, teachers' expectations of how much work students can cover in the time available is too low and, as a consequence, the pace of learning is too slow. In some lessons teachers are also not making effective use of questioning to check and develop the learning of all students. Students are aware of their targets and the progress they are making. Due to improvements made to the quality of written and oral feedback to students, they are now better aware of what they need to do to improve their work. Students are appreciative of the improvements made to the feedback they receive and state that this is helping them learn. However, there is still variation in the quality of feedback they are receiving across the college.

The last monitoring inspection reported that the college had planned a more flexible Key Stage 4 curriculum that better met the needs of students through a broader range of vocational and academic courses. Good progress has been made towards introducing this curriculum in September 2011. The links effectively forged with local business and industry are also having a positive impact on raising students' aspirations. Good plans are now being developed to improve the Key Stage 3 curriculum so that it is more responsive to students' needs. The sixth form curriculum is also being reviewed so that appropriate courses can be introduced that build on those now being offered in Key Stage 4.

Although there has been some improvement in the progress being made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the college tracking data indicate that they are still attaining well below their targets. The acting special educational needs coordinator has taken some sensible action in order to improve provision, such as providing clear information to teachers about the learning needs of vulnerable students and producing a helpful booklet giving advice to staff about how to meet their needs. However, teachers are not consistently making effective use of this information to plan lessons that meet their needs and this is limiting their progress. The quality of lesson support from teaching assistants has improved and good practice was observed. However, the quality of support is variable with

teaching assistants on occasions doing too much for students rather than supporting their learning.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise achievement by improving provision – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The governing body and the principal have been successful in establishing a settled and effective senior leadership team. The team has been strengthened by the permanent appointment of two new vice principals and two assistant principals. The principal has continued to provide the college with clear and effective leadership and she is well supported by the senior leadership team. Together they have been effective in raising expectations about the quality of provision and driving up the ambition of staff and students. The monitoring and evaluation role of middle leaders is developing well and beginning to reduce the variation in the quality of teaching, student achievement and behaviour across the college. However, variations remain and continuing to improve the effectiveness of middle leaders remains an important area of development if improvements are to be firmly embedded across the college. The college development plan addresses the issues raised by the previous inspection well. The governing body is monitoring the implementation and impact of the action plan well and is providing senior leaders with an increasingly effective level of challenge as well as support.

The system to track the progress of students towards challenging targets is now being used more effectively by senior and middle leaders to analyse the performance of both individual students and different groups. Effective action is being taken to address any underperformance and, as a result, achievement across the school is rising and the difference in progress between different groups of students is beginning to close. Effective procedures are in place to ensure that statutory policies related to equalities are regularly updated and agreed. The senior leadership team provides regular updates to the governing body about the effectiveness of current plans. The closing gap in achievement between different groups of students is evidence of the effectiveness of these plans.

Since the last monitoring inspection opportunities across the curriculum to develop students' understanding of different religions and cultures have been developed well. For example, the religious studies department has examined racial disadvantages and ethnic diversity in Britain. Students' understanding of the diversity of faiths, ethnicities and cultures found within Britain has also been enhanced through links with another school in London. The international dimension of community cohesion is being effectively developed through links with Japan and China.

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 – good.

External support

The college and the local authority continue to work together well to improve provision and student outcomes. The local authority is monitoring the implementation and impact of college actions well. Effective subject support has been provided for English, mathematics and special educational needs since the last monitoring inspection. The local authority has also carried out a helpful review of science provision.