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27 January 2012

Mr Seamus Murphy
Headteacher
Dartford Technology College
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Dear Mr Murphy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Dartford Technology College

Following my visit with Steven Smith and John Worgan, additional inspectors, to your school on 25–26 January 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the following conditions:

- appointments may only be made to the school's most effective departments, where strong support for professional development can be assured
- the local authority supports the appointment
- Her Majesty's Inspector leading the monitoring inspections supports the appointment.

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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2011

- By January 2012, ensure that steps are in place to ensure that attainment improves significantly and rises towards national averages by:
 - ensuring that managers at all levels systematically identify areas for development and improvement
 - ensuring that the governing body frequently sets and monitors progress towards challenging targets
 - analysing and using data more effectively and consistently at all levels to review students' progress and attainment
 - setting timescales for actions taken to improve and evaluating their impact more rigorously.

- By January 2012, improve the promotion of equal opportunities by:
 - analysing, monitoring and reporting on the performance of different groups of students more comprehensively, clearly identifying any gaps
 - specifically targeting any gaps between groups for improvement so that these can be tackled and narrowed
 - ensuring that the school's managers and the governing body assess effectively the impact of work to promote equalities
 - ensuring that the governing body receives clearer and more comprehensive reports on the performance of different groups.

- By April 2012, significantly raise the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - improving the use of assessment information in the planning of lessons so that activities and learning aims are suitably challenging for students of all abilities
 - developing teachers' skills in the use of strategies to check that learning is taking place throughout the lesson
 - improving the quality and consistency of written feedback on students' work so that all students are clear about how they can improve and achieve higher grades
 - sharing more effectively the good assessment practice that exists in the school.

Special measures: monitoring of Dartford Technology College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 25–26 January 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of staff, students, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority, and a consultant headteacher who provides mentoring and coaching for senior leaders.

Context

The headteacher at the time of the last inspection retired at the end of the summer term, and a new headteacher took up his post at the beginning of the new academic year. Three teachers have left the school and have not yet been replaced, so their work is being covered by supply teachers. Three more teachers are due to leave at the end of this term. The headteacher is in the process of reorganising roles and responsibilities in the school's leadership team. One deputy headteacher is in a temporary post.

A new Chair of the Governing Body took up the role at the start of the academic year. Three governors have left the governing body. One parent governor and one from the local authority have replaced them and there is a vacancy for a parent governor.

Achievement of students at the school

GCSE results in 2011, especially in mathematics and English, were substantially better than in 2010, largely as a result of effective intervention and extra support for students in Year 11 as they approached examinations. Although this improvement had a positive impact on the proportion of students gaining five grades at A* to C including English and mathematics, too few students made enough progress, especially in mathematics. As a result, students' achievement overall at the end of Year 11 remained low. Current data for Year 11 show that further improvement in GCSE results is likely in 2012, but may still not reach the national average in mathematics, or for some groups of students, including those with special educational needs and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals.

In lessons, the rate at which students in all year groups make progress is accelerating and is closely linked to the quality of teaching. The school now has a secure system for assessing students' attainment and tracking their progress over time, and the accuracy of the data collected is improving. Senior leaders carry out regular monitoring and analysis of the progress of groups of students who are known to be underachieving; for example, White British students, those known to be

eligible for free school meals and students with special educational needs who are supported through School Action Plus. Subject action plans are strongly focused on closing the gap in performance between these groups and their peers.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection – good

- Ensure that steps are in place to ensure that attainment improves significantly and rises towards national averages.

The quality of teaching

Students and staff all report a tangible change in culture since the arrival of the new headteacher and say that the quality of teaching and marking is better, leading to faster progress. The headteacher is regularly visible in lessons and visits every department in the school every week. Teachers describe constructive, useful feedback from the many lesson observations he carries out. A Year 11 student said, 'He cares about how well all of us do, not just those on the C/D borderline.' The impact of the programme of professional development for teachers is already evident in lessons, and the proportion of good or better lessons is rising. In nearly all lessons, planning is thorough, objectives are focused on learning, and students have clear success criteria and regular feedback so they know what they need to do in order to improve. Students work cooperatively together in groups and are increasingly talking to one another about their learning. In weaker lessons, especially when teachers talk for too long, students are sometimes less interested and there may be some low-level chatter that disrupts learning.

In the best lessons, teachers use ongoing assessment to adapt their plans to meet the needs of students, especially in English, modern foreign languages, and design and technology. Information about students' prior attainment and their progress over time is now available, but it is not used consistently to ensure that work is matched to students' needs. Although lesson plans often identify support for specific groups of students, this is not seen happening in lessons. Teaching assistants are well deployed and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported outside the classroom. In lessons, however, assessment information about achievement or appropriate strategies to use for individuals are not used effectively to target students' specific needs and ensure progression. Sometimes, students are given a different worksheet, but there is very rarely a different task from the start of the lesson. Similarly, extra extension work may be provided for more-able students, but challenge through a different activity is unusual. Improving provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is one of the school's areas for development and all departments have action plans which focus on ensuring equality of opportunity for all groups of students.

The new marking policy is consistently applied by teachers, but the quality of implementation is still variable across subjects. Students know their targets and are

increasingly aware of how to improve. They are not always given the opportunity to respond to comments made by the teacher.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection – good

- Significantly raise the proportion of good and better teaching

Behaviour and safety of students

Students are very polite, friendly and cooperative, and the atmosphere in school calm and purposeful. Occasionally, when teaching is not sufficiently stimulating, especially for those who are more able, low-level off-task behaviour can slow the pace of learning. Exclusions are very low, and students and staff say that behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is generally good. They report that the way behaviour is managed is strict but fair, and that they feel safe in school. They value the fact that the headteacher listens to their views about the quality of teaching and learning, and about practical issues, such as plans for a new school uniform.

Systems to improve attendance and reduce the number of students who are persistently absent are increasingly robust and effective. Attendance is now close to the national average. The school monitors attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities, and has a clear picture of variation between different groups of students. Strategies to tackle this are starting to make a difference.

The school's single central record meets requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since his appointment in September, the headteacher has made rapid improvements to the school's provision, although the impact the changes are having on outcomes is not yet secure. His long-term vision is clear and well understood by staff at all levels. Although the pace of change has been fast, and some teachers feel pressured as a result, overall, staff trust his leadership and are beginning to feel more confident as a result of professional development to improve teaching. Both teaching and non-teaching staff say they feel valued, and that there is an appropriate balance between accountability and support.

The school improvement plan to tackle the immediate concerns identified at the last inspection has precise objectives and includes appropriate tasks, measurable success criteria and systems for monitoring and evaluation of the impact of actions taken. A culture of accountability is developing through a new performance management system. Self-evaluation is accurate and sharp; for example a curriculum review for the next academic year is already underway. A sensible balance is being maintained between the need to provide intervention to support the attainment of students in

the current Year 11 and the implementation of long-term sustainable change that will lead to improved outcomes across the school.

Although the headteacher is providing inspiring and very effective leadership, the quality of management at other levels remains inconsistent. Roles and responsibilities within the leadership team are being reorganised, and the quality of middle management remains very variable. Although subject leaders are enthusiastic, welcoming change and feeling very accountable, they are not all able to identify or articulate the impact of actions they have taken. They have welcomed the opportunity to meet regularly, but are not yet systematically sharing good practice.

The new Chair of the Governing Body has taken a rigorous and robust approach to developing the skills of the governing body, so it has the confidence and expertise to challenge the school's leaders and hold them to account, especially about students' achievement. A comprehensive action plan is already in place and an audit of governors' skills is used to ensure that each governor is deployed to ensure maximum impact. The headteacher provides the governing body with comprehensive but succinct data about the performance and provision for groups of students. The accuracy of this data is improving but is not yet secure. Some training has been completed and more is planned to make sure that all governors can fully understand and probe the information they are given. Individual governors are now linked to departments, and are making regular visits to school to find out first hand and report back strengths, weaknesses and barriers to improvement, in order to inform future planning. Monthly challenge meetings ensure regular and robust monitoring of progress towards tackling the areas for improvement at the last inspection. A new equalities policy has been ratified to give a robust framework for the governing body to monitor the quality of provision and achievement of underachieving groups of students.

Although achievement in the school's technology specialism is good, and all students study an aspect of the subject, there is no evidence that technology has a positive impact on either the curriculum or the quality of learning across the school.

Progress since the last inspection – satisfactory

- Improve the promotion of equal opportunities.

External support

The local authority's statement of action addresses the issues raised by the previous inspection well and the school's improvement plan is closely linked to it. The school draws on expertise from other schools both within the local authority and beyond, particularly in developing a new curriculum model and providing support for teaching in drama and science. The local authority provides very effective support for the

headteacher through the school improvement officer and a local consultant headteacher.