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Mr S Murphy
Headteacher
Dartford Technology College
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Dear Mr Murphy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Dartford Technology College

Following my visit with Graham Saltmarsh, Additional Inspector, to your school on 16–17 May 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 second 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the school's most effective departments, where strong support for professional development can be assured

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 second monitoring inspection on 16-17 May 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, teaching and non-teaching staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Two new teachers for music and English and drama started at the school this term. Supply teachers are currently covering five vacancies. Permanent teachers, including a new director of mathematics, have been appointed from September to cover these vacancies and all those created by other staff resignations. As a result of reorganisation of the senior leadership team, two new vice-principals have been appointed, one from outside the school who will start in September and the other promoted from the existing staff.

A parent governor has been appointed to the governing body, so there are now no vacancies.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's systems for tracking students' achievement over time are increasingly reliable and are starting to be used effectively by subject leaders to identify and tackle underachievement. Year 11 students particularly value the amount of support they are receiving from many of their teachers as they prepare for GCSE examinations. In spite of a legacy of underachievement from previous years, GCSE results already published and the school's current data show that this intervention and much better quality teaching are having a positive impact on achievement. The proportion of Year 11 students making the expected progress in English and mathematics in 2012 is likely to exceed the national average and attainment at GCSE is rising sharply. Students continue to perform better in English than mathematics.

The rate at which many students make progress in lessons, including those in the sixth form, is increasing because the quality of teaching is improving. This is particularly the case in Years 9 and 10, for White British students and for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. However, in younger year groups, especially Year 7, students are not making rapid enough progress in English. This is partly because literacy levels are low when students enter the school. Some teachers are not sufficiently ambitious or demanding and weaknesses in literacy are not tackled in a coherent way in every subject. Extra support is provided for students having the most difficulty, and some make rapid improvements in reading, but this is

not consistent. A whole-school literacy strategy and changes to the curriculum to tackle this are already planned for the next academic year.

The school's own data show that students with disabilities and/or special educational needs are not making fast enough progress especially at Key Stage 4. In classrooms there is insufficient focus on both the quality of learning for these students and their progression over time. Teachers are not sufficiently ambitious for them and there is no coordinated system to identify and provide short- and long-term strategies which will help overcome the barriers that prevent some students from learning effectively. However, they are well cared for, and those who have more serious needs are well supported by a competent team of teaching assistants. A new special needs coordinator has been appointed but has not yet had time to make a positive impact on whole-school provision.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement

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

The quality of teaching

There has been a substantial improvement in the quality of teaching since the last visit, with some now outstanding and very little inadequate. As a result, students are enjoying themselves and making faster progress in lessons because teachers are now firmly focused on the quality of learning. Planning is very thorough, lessons are more active and students enjoy the many opportunities to do group work. The best teaching shows an appreciation of the importance of frequently monitoring students' understanding throughout the lesson and then adapting activities in response. The confidence with which teachers use data from assessment to ensure that they provide work that is broadly matched to students' needs varies across departments. In addition, the underlying infrastructure which would facilitate individual and personalised support for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs in lessons is not secure. The best teachers, particularly in practical subjects for older students, such as dance and art, know their students very well, and provide exceptionally personalised guidance and feedback. However, centralised information about students' individual needs and appropriate strategies to help students with disabilities and/or special educational needs to make progress is not easily accessible for teachers. These students are not provided with widely shared short-term targets which are then monitored to ensure small cumulative steps of progress over time.

Marking is now reliably regular and informative and helps students know exactly what they need to do to improve, although not all teachers allow time for making corrections. Students are motivated by the fact what they are expected to learn is made explicit and that they know what to do to reach the target levels they have been set, although these are not always sufficiently ambitious. Sometimes more able students are still expected to work through easier work before they reach activities

that are more appropriate to their ability. Too little may be expected of those who are less able. For example, although students know they are expected to write with correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in English, they may be less conscientious in written work in other subjects. The quality of presentation also varies with the expectations of the teacher. In many lessons, students regularly assess their own and others' work. As a result, they are developing a vocabulary to discuss their learning. Insufficient attention is paid in lessons to developing students' ability to work independently and develop resilience and students' oral communication skills are underdeveloped, especially for those students for whom English is an additional language.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement

- Significantly raise the proportion of good and better teaching – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students say that they enjoy school and they generally show very positive attitudes to learning, particularly younger ones and those in the sixth form. This is reflected in the calm and friendly way in which students conduct themselves and the high level of care they show for the school building. In most lessons, the atmosphere is purposeful, with students fully engaged and taking an active part, especially in group work. Very occasionally there is some low level disruption, and the few students responsible are not sufficiently aware of the negative impact this has on their own and others' learning. Nevertheless, behaviour is well managed and the vast majority of students respond quickly to correction. Opportunities for older students to support and interact with younger ones are limited. When this does occur, students find the experience very valuable. For example, sixth formers completing the community sport leaders' award were seen during the visit working very effectively with Year 6 pupils from a local primary school.

The rate of attendance has improved substantially as a result of very thorough procedures for monitoring and focused work with individual students. This has been particularly effective in Year 10, but less so in Year 11. Thresholds for intervention have been made more rigorous and students are now well aware of the negative impact that poor attendance has on achievement.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher's clear strategic vision and highly visible hands-on approach continue to drive rapid improvement. In spite of the brisk pace of change, the atmosphere in the school is very positive and enthusiastic as staff begin to see the impact of training and robust monitoring on the quality of leadership and teaching and thus students' achievement. Teachers are enjoying the opportunity to develop their skills and are ambitious to improve. Since the last visit, the capacity of the senior leadership team has increased with new appointments from within the school.

Responsibilities within the team have been clarified and systems for monitoring and evaluating provision secured. Although some variability remains, the quality of middle management is more consistent than at the time of the first monitoring visit. Subject leaders have been given training and are now more accountable for ensuring that assessment data are used to track students' progress, identify under-achievement and modify provision. They have also taken on more responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching. Self-evaluation is honest and secure; for example, the headteacher is well aware that there are currently too many temporary teachers and that the curriculum is not meeting all students' needs effectively. All vacancies have been filled for the start of the autumn term and the curriculum has been reorganised. The implementation of plans to develop both leadership and provision for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs has been slow but is now beginning to accelerate.

The governing body has taken an active role in monitoring improvements, providing support but also constantly challenging the school's leaders. Governors are provided with succinct and accurate information about the school's work, including regular updates about students' achievement. Robust arrangements for ensuring that statutory responsibilities are being met have been put in place and clear protocols developed for making visits to school and reporting back to the governing body. The headteacher has taken the lead in improving communication with parents, including seeking their views, but this is an area for further development by the governing body.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the promotion of equal opportunities – satisfactory

External support

The school's leadership team continues to be supported by the acting lead challenge advisor from the local authority. Partnerships with a range of different schools have been developed for specific purposes, for example raising standards, curriculum development, the organisation of English and mathematics and helping some teachers move from good to outstanding through master classes.