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17 January 2013

Miss Karen Castrey
Headteacher
Sandon High School Business and Enterprise College
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Dear Miss Castrey

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Sandon Business, Enterprise and Arts College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college on 16 January 2013 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. I would particularly like to thank members of the governing body who made themselves available at short notice and the students and staff who gave up part of their lunch time to share their views.

Since the last inspection the college has resolved many staffing issues arising from the closure of a neighbouring school. This has now resulted in a much more stable staffing. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where a new director and several new teaching appointments have been made.

As a result of the inspection on 23–24 May 2012, the college 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 college is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The recruitment of a highly experienced director for mathematics, who is a strong teacher, has been vital in driving improvements in the subject. The overall staffing is now stable, with three other permanent staff appointed. A strong team spirit has quickly been established. Planning is more thorough and based on a secure knowledge of the performance of each student. Work provided is, consequently, better matched to their needs, including the most-able. Students overwhelmingly recognise that teaching in mathematics has greatly improved since September. This is confirmed by a local authority review of the subject and four lesson observations undertaken on this inspection. Much of the teaching is now good and none is inadequate. Although some teaching could improve further, the training and development of staff in the department is ensuring that there is a

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steady improvement. The headteacher oversees the department and carefully monitors that this improvement continues. The school entered most of the current Year 11 for examinations early. This was in order to obtain a secure assessment of each student's current attainment, as the college did not have confidence in previous assessments of progress. The intention is to enter many students again in the summer so that they can achieve grades in line with their potential. Results already gained show a strong improvement in attainment. If projected results by the end of the year are achieved, attainment in the subject could be broadly in line with those seen in most other schools. Students in all year groups are now making much stronger and improving progress due to more effective teaching. Teachers are using data well to track progress and to provide effective early interventions, where needed.

Teaching is improving right across the college due to strong leadership and the many training opportunities provided. This includes work with partner schools, but also the effective sharing of good practice within the college. The careful matching of work to students' abilities and the effective use of data to inform planning are seen in all subject areas. Marking is now thorough, with next steps identified regularly. Students understand their targets, both for the present academic year and by the time they leave the college. Inconsistencies remain, but determined leadership is ensuring that these are reducing as books, planning and lessons are regularly checked by subject leaders and senior managers. Questioning is good in some lessons, but in others seeks simple answers rather than deeper thinking and the sharing of ideas. In some lessons observed students were given responsibility for leading parts of lessons, or enabled to assess their own work carefully. The large majority of lessons are currently good or better and none inadequate, according to college records.

The leadership of attendance is strong and the work of the attendance strategy team is effective. The local authority has assisted the school by providing additional officer time. Regular letters home, making parents aware of both good and weak attendance, have had considerable impact. Students welcome regular rewards and the celebration of good attendance and understand the impact of poor attendance on their learning. All staff accept responsibility for ensuring good attendance. Attendance in the autumn term 2012 was greatly improved on the same period in 2011. College leaders are determined that stronger systems will ensure that there is no repeat of the fall off seen in the previous year. Attendance is currently similar to that seen in most secondary schools.

Self-evaluation has been improved, with the college documentation having been revised significantly. The local authority review and joint inspections at this inspection show that senior staff are able to make accurate judgements of teaching and learning. They can recognise strengths and weaknesses and have taken decisive action to improve the college. Not all planning, evaluation and monitoring are currently linked in the documentation. The headteacher keeps planning, monitoring and evaluation under review and is aware of this. Subject leaders are increasingly accountable for monitoring, evaluation and review in their own areas. Governors gain strong first-hand information from visits and are well informed and proactive.

Specialist status in Business and Enterprise and the Arts contributes strongly to the success of the college. The strong links with business and education partners, particularly through the Trust, are appreciated by students in helping them to prepare for the future. The college has achieved Artsmark status and has worked effectively with Trust partners on arts projects.

The local authority action plan has been revised, with clear milestones and measurable targets added. It is now fit for purpose and is helping the college to check that good progress is being made against key areas identified for improvement. The support from the local authority and partner schools has been effective in providing challenge and professional development opportunities to the college at many levels.

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

Yours sincerely

Mr David Martin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012.

- Raise attainment and accelerate students' progress in mathematics so that most students perform, at the very least, in line with their peers nationally by:
 - improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics
 - improving subject leadership in mathematics so that there is a clear focus on improving standards of achievement in the subject
 - using the progress data available for each student in mathematics to inform teaching and identify areas for improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that most lessons are good or better by:
 - sharing the good practice that already exists more widely across the college
 - making sure that activities in lessons meet the needs of all groups of learners, particularly the most able, so that they reach the highest standards
 - ensuring that teachers' questions give students opportunities to think more deeply about their learning and improve their understanding
 - making sure that marking and feedback to students are of high quality so that students know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average by continuing to monitor rigorously the attendance of students at the college and to provide intensive support for those whose attendance is a cause for concern.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by making sure that self-evaluation of the college's performance is rigorous and precise, and is used effectively in all aspects of the college's work to set targets for further development.