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9 May 2013

Mr Gavin Ball  
Principal  
Frome Community College  
Bath Road  
Frome  
BA11 2HQ

Dear Mr Ball

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Frome Community College**

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 2013 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Somerset and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

James Sage

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012**

- Improve teaching, so that it is at least good, by:
  - ensuring all teachers check students' progress during lessons and adapt their teaching if needed so that each student makes as much progress as possible and that no time is wasted
  - making sure that all teachers inform students how to improve their work through written feedback.
  
- Raise achievement for students overall, and especially for boys, by developing students' literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects.
  
- Make sure that students, and boys in particular, behave consistently well in all lessons through teaching that engages, challenges and interests them. Share the good practice that exists in the college and in the partner school.
  
- Improve the leadership and management of teaching and learning by developing the skills of all leaders and managers in:
  - checking the quality of teaching
  - coaching teachers about how to improve
  - taking action with teachers where the progress their students make is not good enough.
  
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 May 2013**

### **Evidence**

The inspector met with the Principal and all other senior leaders, and with the Chair and another member of the Governing Body. The inspector undertook a series of joint lesson observations with senior and middle leaders to check the progress made in improving specific aspects of teaching, including those identified as requiring improvement in the previous inspection report. During these lessons, the inspector looked at students' work and talked to them about it. The inspector also discussed the school's analysis of current students' progress with senior leaders.

### **Context**

At the time of the first monitoring visit in January 2013, it was stated that the school intended to become a sponsored academy in September 2013. The school has held discussions with three different possible sponsors but, as a result of problems with the on-site leisure centre and swimming pool, this process has been significantly delayed. It is unlikely that the school will become a sponsored academy until at least Easter 2014. Prior to the inspection in October 2012, the school had an order to convert to an academy as an 'academy convertor'. Although this was put on hold by the outcomes of the inspection in October 2012, this order still stands. As a result, the school is unable to access certain local authority funding.

A number of teachers have left, or planned to leave, the school since the first monitoring visit. Significant key staff changes are planned for the next school year, particularly new leaders in English, mathematics and science.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

The school's extended senior leadership team has a strong blend of complementary skills. The Principal is skilful in managing this team to make the most effective use of these talents within a clear and challenging vision for how to improve the school. Senior leaders and governors have an accurate view of the progress the school has made and about what needs to improve further. Planned actions are focused precisely on the improvements required and challenging, clear benchmarks for improvement enable progress to be monitored accurately.

The changes noted in the report on the first monitoring visit are beginning to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching and, hence, students' achievements in the school, including in the sixth form.

- The school's rigorous monitoring systems indicate that more students are on track to make the progress expected from the time they enter the school at the start of Year 9, with more now making better than expected progress. While there is clear improvement for students currently in Year 11, improvements are

more marked for those currently in Years 9 and 10. These improvements can be seen in the quality of students' work.

- Gaps in students' performance, for example between boys and girls, are narrowing. The performance of students eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding for certain groups of students) is also improving; these additional funds are being used well.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is also improving. The curriculum is being more closely matched to their needs, including exploring the development of apprenticeships with local employers.
- Joint lesson observations conducted during the visit show clearly that senior leaders, and those middle leaders involved this time, make accurate judgements of the quality of teaching.
- Improvements in teachers' planning, matching work better to students' needs and in monitoring their progress are becoming embedded across the school. Teachers make more effective use of questioning to involve all students in the lesson, to probe and develop deeper understanding, and to monitor the quality of learning. However, there is still some inconsistency in the quality of this questioning and in how well students' progress is monitored during lessons.
- Senior leaders know about this inconsistency in the quality of teaching and that more needs to be consistently good; they are absolutely clear about where support needs to be targeted.
- Senior leaders are also fully aware that more needs to be done to further improve the quality of marking and guidance given to students on how to improve their work, and to ensure that students respond to this feedback.
- Extensive work has been done to tackle weaknesses in students' literacy skills, including further work with the two partner middle schools. In addition to focused support for students entering the school in Year 9, all teachers attempt to integrate work on literacy into their lessons, some to great effect and others more limited. This is still work in progress. Similarly, some opportunities to develop students' skills in numeracy are still not fully exploited. In the next school year the leadership of both of these areas will be enhanced and brought within a further extended senior leadership team. The school leaders and governors are fully aware of the vital importance of raising literacy levels in particular.
- The improved arrangements for the appraisal and performance management of teachers have been used effectively to eliminate inadequate teaching. Individual support plans and targets are helping to raise the quality of teaching.
- Clear guidelines have been established for key aspects of teaching, such as an intellectually robust model for planning lessons, while enabling teachers to be creative and flexible, for example, to meet subject-specific requirements.
- The evidence from this visit supports the school's view that behaviour in the school has improved over a short time to good levels.
- At the time of the first monitoring visit it was noted that the governing body had put some of its plans on hold because of the discussions about the change to become a sponsored academy. It is now going ahead with these plans and has appointed additional governors to provide the skills identified through its review

of the governing body. They are well placed to provide the school's leaders with both good support and the necessary challenge. They valued the recent training in how to analyse the school's information on how well students are progressing.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- the way that the Principal, since his arrival in the school and supported well by other senior leaders, combines a relentless focus on the key improvement points with a range of approaches to ensure students in the school have a rich and varied range of experiences; in particular, the initiatives involving the local community
- the clarity about key aspects of teaching that require consistent approaches across the school, blended with flexibility to enable those teachers already teaching at a consistently good or better quality to sustain this and encourage them to use innovative and creative approaches to teaching and learning
- the clear identification of what individual teachers need to do to improve their teaching and the targeted support provided, including the careful use of the good and better practice in the school
- the thoroughness of tracking and monitoring arrangements.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- there are no significant weaknesses in the school's approach and senior leaders are fully aware of the need to continue to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and to ensure the accuracy and reliability of assessment information used in the student tracking system.

### **External support**

The school has made very good use of senior staff's own contacts to procure high-quality support, for example in English, mathematics, science and other curriculum areas. This support is targeted well on improving the quality of teaching. Support from the local authority is limited, although the school has received some additional targeted funding because of the serious weaknesses designation. This is being used to fund some of the external support. The school makes excellent use of its extensive community links to enrich the experiences of its students.

The school is currently in a difficult position because of the delays in clarifying its future academy status. While school leaders focus relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching and raising students' achievements, they and governors are distracted by these concerns about the future of the school and about funding.