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Robert Gammon
Headteacher
Robert Blake Science College
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Dear Mr Gammon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Robert Blake Science College

Following my visit to your college on 13 February, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the college since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the college was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The college should take further action to:

- ensure the college action plan includes regular, formal evaluation points to enable progress against the objectives to be measured precisely
- make sure middle leaders have the necessary skills and resources to monitor the quality of teaching, including marking and feedback, and the progress made by students, especially those with lower ability
- ensure staff and governors are familiar with the findings of the Ofsted survey reports *Getting to good – How headteachers achieve success* and *School governance – Learning from the best* and how they can be used to support the college's work in improving teaching and raising standards.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, the senior leadership team and a number of middle leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. In addition, I held telephone discussions with the college's improvement partner and a representative of the local authority. I also toured the college with you and visited a number of lessons. Various documents were evaluated including the action plan drawn up following the last section 5 inspection

Context

Since the last inspection the college has completed the reorganisation of provision for students with special educational needs. This has included the appointment of a deputy special educational needs coordinator and a parent and family support adviser. In addition, the roles of learning support assistants (LSAs) have been reviewed to enhance specific responsibilities within teams.

Main findings

The college's action plan is effectively linked to the recommendations in the inspection report. Priorities for improvement are suitably detailed, key personnel identified, the resources required are noted and success criteria outlined. However, although there are stated review dates for each objective, these are not sharply focused on clearly defined and, where appropriate, measureable outcomes to support the effective evaluation of progress.

Under your leadership, senior and middle leaders and the governing body display a strong commitment to improve the achievement of all students. This has focused, correctly, on developing provision for lower ability students and those with special educational needs. The provision for these students has been re-structured with a stronger role for LSAs working in teams with specific responsibilities for a range of support. Recent appointments include team leaders for LSA teams, a parent and family support adviser and a deputy special educational needs co-ordinator. The re-structuring will be complete by the beginning of the summer term.

Senior leaders have worked well to refine the system for tracking students' progress with a focus on developing procedures which can be used easily by staff in order to plan lessons and assess outcomes. An example of this are the learning profiles which give a clear breakdown of the assessments and specific needs of each student and are easily available to staff. Middle leaders noted that this was having a positive effect on the planning of work for groups and individuals. The tracking systems in place readily provide good quality information on the progress made by individuals, class groups and year cohorts and this information is increasing being used by senior leaders to develop appropriate provision and hold staff to account.

Subject and progress team leaders are more involved in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the development of support for students. Examples include the sharing of effective practice between teachers and LSAs at regular 'Learning Lunches' and 'Learning Breakfasts'. There have also been links between various subject teams to share effective practice. However, more formal evaluation by middle leaders is still developing and has yet to be refined into firm procedures which can focus on specific aspects of teaching and the progress made by targeted groups of students.

Staff have been involved in the development of marking and feedback for students. Following consultation there is now a project in place across the college to standardise the expectations for marking and feedback in order to improve learning for students. This initiative will be evaluated during the summer term.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the college until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The college benefits from a range of external support including through its improvement partner and the local authority. The college is a member of the 'Somerset Challenge' group of schools which has a focus on raising achievement. In addition, the college works with the local schools through the Bridgwater Educational Trust and the local further education college.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector