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Mrs S Todd
Headteacher
Southfield Technology College
Moorclose Road
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 5BH

Dear Mrs Todd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southfield Technology College

Following my visit to your school on 27 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, head of sixth form, the interim headteacher of Stainburn School and Science College, two governors and representatives of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the college's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

The headteacher has left. An interim headteacher and executive headteacher have been seconded to the college and have just taken up their posts. The executive

headteacher is leading developments that apply to both Southfield Technology College and Stainburn School and Science College. Consultation on the closure of both colleges and the formation of one new academy is under way. Academy sponsorship is out for tender. The local authority has applied to the Department for Education for the creation of an Interim Executive Board (IEB) to replace the governing bodies of both colleges.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Staff and governors were initially shocked at the judgement that the college requires special measures. There was some disbelief, which delayed work on improvement planning. The newly appointed leaders have energised the college and report that staff are motivated to secure improvements quickly. Together with the deputy headteacher, they are providing strong direction based on a good understanding of what needs to be done. Leaders are making good use of local expertise and developing partnership working with a number of schools and consultants. There is also some effective practice in the college on which to build. These factors give the college the capacity to secure further improvements.

Around half the governors resigned following notification that an IEB is going to be established. Those who remain show a strong commitment to the college and its students. However, their influence is limited because they are unsure about their role until the IEB is established and the contribution any current governors may be able to make subsequently. They feel that communication has been poor. These issues require further clarification from the local authority.

The local authority statement of action shows clearly the long-term vision for the college, while maintaining a focus on students' achievement. Appropriate actions are planned to tackle the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The plan would benefit from greater clarity about who will check that actions are progressing as planned and how and the impact of the actions will be gauged.

The college improvement plan has not yet been fully adapted to take account of the inspection findings. The targets for students' attainment and progress are not consistent with the local authority's statement of action and the plans to improve teaching are not precise enough. Subject plans lack analysis of precisely what needs to improve in each subject. Leaders are in the process of rewriting the college improvement plan and reviewing subject action plans. They are ensuring that staff have the opportunity to contribute their views and ideas.

Although the college's improvement plans have not been fully adapted, staff have already taken some action to bring about improvement. They have been promoting

good attendance and students with the lowest attendance have received additional support. This has resulted in a reduction in persistent absenteeism and better attendance overall compared with the same period last year. Students' academic achievement targets have been reviewed to ensure that students are on track to make at least expected progress from their starting points. Data are being used more effectively to make sure students who are falling behind receive additional support to help them catch up. Some new approaches have been introduced in English to motivate and interest boys. The initiatives are at early stages but show that staff are willing to make changes and keen to move their practice forward.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The college's improvement plans are not currently fit for purpose.

The college may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, without first consulting with the monitoring HMI.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director of Children's Services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector