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23 May 2014

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

Dear Mrs Todd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southfield Technology College

Following my visit with Steven Goldsmith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 May 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 previous monitoring inspection.

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

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

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers, following discussion with me, before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Raise the quality of teaching in order to accelerate progress and raise standards, particularly for boys, more-able students and all students in English, by:
 - making sure teachers adapt their teaching so that all students are engaged and interested in the work they are given
 - increasing the level of stretch and challenge in lessons so that the more-able students make good or better progress
 - ensuring teachers across all subjects develop students' literacy skills by correcting spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes
 - giving students opportunities to act on the guidance they are given to improve their work and checking up to see they have followed such advice.
- Make sure attendance improves at a faster rate by:
 - exploring effective practice to raise attendance used by other schools
 - enlisting the support of all parents, carers and students more effectively
- Improve achievement in the sixth form by tackling areas of underperformance and also by increasing the proportion of students gaining the top grades in examinations.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - raising expectations by making targets more challenging throughout the school and thereby raising achievement
 - refining the school development plan so that key actions are more precisely focused on areas of underperformance
 - working with external partners to secure the financial stability of the school in the short and medium term
 - undertaking an external review of governance to make sure governors have a realistic view regarding the school's performance and challenge the school more effectively to raise standards.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21 – 22 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching and sampled students' work. They scrutinised documents including school improvement planning, self-evaluation and students' progress tracking. Inspectors met with senior leaders, subject leaders and groups of students. The lead inspector had telephone conversations with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors spoke with the vast majority of teachers individually.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection an IEB has been established and has met twice. Formal notification of the closure of Southfield Technology College and Stainburn School and Science College has been given. The head of English has left and an acting head of department and supply teacher have been appointed. An assistant headteacher has been appointed to lead on student support for learning. The interim headteacher and executive headteacher had just taken up their posts at the time of the first monitoring inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The main priority this term has been to make sure Year 11 and Year 13 students are well prepared for examinations. Year 11 students have received additional support to help them fill gaps in their learning and make sure they achieve the best possible grades. They have made more rapid progress in the last three months as a result. School data show that achievement in the sixth form has also improved in almost all subjects.

Students' progress in lessons has quickened recently in all year groups, because teachers are building on their prior learning more effectively. New data systems enable teachers to identify students who are not making expected progress so they can provide extra support to help them get back on track quickly. Work is better matched to the ability of students and additional challenge is being added for the most able students. All ability groups are making better progress as a result. Teachers are checking the progress of boys more closely. Some changes have been made to help boys become more engaged in their learning, but it is too soon to see the results of these initiatives.

The quality of teaching

The vast majority of teachers are keen to improve and have taken changes on board with enthusiasm. They use a range of creative approaches to sustain students' interest. Teachers are making better use of assessment information to plan activities

at the right level. Students make the best progress in lessons where teachers adapt their teaching to provide additional challenge or address misunderstandings before moving on to the next steps. This was seen in music, German, English and mathematics. However, checking students' understanding is not yet used effectively in all subjects, so some students still have gaps in their learning.

Students' books show that more is being expected of them in many subjects. Students make most rapid progress where they are expected to write at length or solve complex problems that require them to sustain concentration and apply their knowledge. Their work is well presented, so that books provide a useful record of what has been learned. However, students' productivity and presentation vary between classes. Some written tasks do not demand enough of students, particularly those of higher ability. Some work is poorly organised, meaning that students find it difficult to look back on what they have learned.

Marking has improved considerably in the last three months. Teachers provide helpful comments and students are given time to make corrections and improve their work. Sixth-form students' work is being marked more rigorously against grade criteria so they have clearer guidance on how to achieve higher grades in examinations.

Literacy skills are being given more of an emphasis in marking but there are still missed opportunities to develop subject-specific literacy skills in lessons. For example, students are not encouraged to use technical vocabulary proficiently in their spoken responses and writing. Students' skills to explain and analyse are not developed as well as they could be.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of students are well behaved in lessons and sensible and polite in shared areas of the college. Relationships are supportive and encouraging so students feel safe and well cared for. Students and staff are extremely positive about the new behaviour code and all have a clear understanding of sanctions and rewards. The increased focus on managing students' behaviour through interesting teaching and effective classroom management is reducing the removal of students from lessons. Although students are almost always cooperative in lessons, they do not always engage fully with their learning because they lack confidence to ask questions or offer their views.

Attendance is higher than it was during the same period last year. Targeted work with families has helped to reduce persistent absenteeism and rewards and incentives for the good attendance are proving effective. Students particularly enjoyed the 'onesie' day and attendance improved considerably as a result.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

New leaders have achieved a lot in three months and there has been a noticeable shift in the culture of the college. Teachers are extremely positive about the changes and several sought out inspectors to say how much they appreciate the renewed sense of direction. 'The interim headteacher has reinvigorated me and many of the staff with her determination and hard work to make Southfield a success.' and 'I feel included and part of a team that is working hard to improve the school.' are typical of the many comments made by staff. Students are equally as positive. They feel that teaching is getting better, behaviour is improving and the, 'headteacher is out and about the school ... in a good way!'

The partnership between the executive and interim headteachers works successfully. The executive headteacher is leading strategic developments well, including plans to form a new academy. She is organising professional development to improve the skills of leaders at all levels and ensure lines of accountability are clear. This enables the interim headteacher and senior team to focus on improving teaching and raising achievement. All have a clear view of what needs to be done to build on strengths and tackle weaknesses. The school development plan has been rewritten and is now fit for purpose. Leaders have set challenging targets for students' progress, thereby raising the expectations of teachers and subject leaders.

Procedures to check on the quality of teaching and track students' progress provide an accurate view of students' attainment and progress. Senior leaders provide incisive feedback to support teachers in improving their practice in lessons. While students are making better progress in lessons, teaching does not consistently build on prior learning across the year because some teachers are not following an effective scheme of work. Leaders have identified inadequacies in longer-term curriculum planning and are beginning a full review in all subjects.

An IEB has been established to support strategic leadership and secure improvement at both Southfield Technology College and Stainburn School and Science College. Members of the IEB have a range of expertise. The Chair is extremely well informed and has an insightful view of what needs to be done to secure improvement at Southfield.

External support

The local authority has supported the school well in the commissioning of high-quality external support. They secured the appointment of the executive headteacher and the interim headteacher to make sure strategic developments proceed smoothly and no time is lost in planning for improvement. Leaders have organised a range of external support for professional development and developed effective partnerships with other schools.