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Ms G Comber
Headteacher
The West Somerset Community College
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Dear Ms Comber

Special measures monitoring inspection of The West Somerset College

Following my visit to your college on 17 December 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 college's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, and the Chair of the Governing Body and another member. The college's statement of action and improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in October, the leader of the sixth form has left the school. No other significant staff changes have taken place, although several teachers are on sick leave. Some staff changes are planned for January 2015.

The college day has been changed so that there are now five 65-minute lessons. Changes have also been made to the Year 9 curriculum.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Progress since the inspection in October has been too slow. While senior leaders and governors have identified what needs to be done, there has been a lack of urgency in taking key actions. The dramatic decline in achievement shown by the 2014 GCSE examination results seems to have taken senior leaders by surprise. Following the sudden departure of the sixth form leader, the college has not undertaken any detailed analysis of the 2014 post-16 examination results. Senior leaders' and governors' monitoring of the college's performance was not rigorous enough.

The following areas need to be addressed quickly, with evidence of improvement by the time of my next monitoring visit:

- Carry out a rigorous evaluation of students' current achievement and the quality of teaching in all subject areas, including in the sixth form.
- Plan a sequence of frequent further subject reviews to check the pace of improvement and enable appropriate actions to be determined, implemented and evaluated.
- Review the college's assessment arrangements to focus more on teachers' on-going assessment of students' progress in their current work.
- Ensure that all teachers use this current assessment information in their planning and teaching so that all students make at least good progress.
- Ensure that all subject and curriculum leaders undertake close checking of the accuracy of teachers' assessment through work scrutiny and other strategies.
- Ensure that senior leaders frequently check with subject and curriculum leaders that improvements are rapid and sustained.
- Make sure that all teachers and subject leaders fully understand that the quality of teaching will be evaluated through its impact on students' progress over time.
- Make sure that all teachers, and subject and curriculum leaders, recognise that much low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons results from weaknesses in teaching and take appropriate actions.
- In the sixth form, analyse why there are significant gaps in the attainment of students with the same starting points in many subjects, with a specific focus on the quality of teaching, students' use of their independent study time and their attendance.

The college has implemented a wide range of actions to improve students' attendance. However, it needs external support to overcome substantial barriers to success. I agreed to try to identify other schools the college can work with.

Many parents have raised concerns about the college, many through Parent View. The college leaders and governors are fully aware of this and are working hard to restore parents' trust and confidence.

The external reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium have been completed.

The review of governance judges that the current governing body has the capacity to bring about the improvements required. However, the report agrees with the inspection finding that governors need to be less reliant on the information they are given and undertake independent reviews of the college's performance and progress.

The college received the report on the review of the use of the pupil premium just before this visit. The report raises significant concerns, but the college leaders and governing body have not yet had sufficient time to analyse the report and plan the actions required. This will be checked during my next monitoring visit.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The college's statement of action and improvement plans are fit for purpose.

However, the statement of action requires some amendments prior to my next monitoring visit. The statement and improvement plans need to make clearer:

- the milestone targets for raising students' achievement and attendance
- how actions to improve the quality of teaching will be evaluated through the impact on students' progress and their attitudes and behaviour in lessons
- the timescale over which all teaching will become at least consistently good
- the arrangements for evaluating, as well as monitoring, the college's progress.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint Newly Qualified Teachers.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector