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Mr Trevor Dunn
Acting Headteacher
Fyndoune Community College
Findon Hill
Sacriston
Durham
DH7 6LU

Dear Mr Dunn

Special measures monitoring inspection of Fyndoune Community College

Following my visit with Graeme Clarke, Additional Inspector, to your college on 19 and 20 May 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. 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 college is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The college may not appoint newly qualified teachers 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 Corporate Director of Children's and Adults' Services for Durham.

Yours sincerely

David Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014

- Urgently improve governance so that:
 - the college, working with the federation, has a clear, well-informed and ambitious vision and strategy for the education of all the young people in its care
 - college leaders are held to account for the quality of education in the college, especially of disadvantaged students, the most able and those with a disability and special educational needs
 - all policies meet requirements, are up-to-date and ratified by the governing body, especially those relating to the impact of pupil premium funding, the curriculum, the impact of Year 7 'catch-up' funding and the support offered to those students who are disabled and have special educational needs.

- Urgently improve the quality and impact of leadership and management, including that of special educational needs, by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders are capable of leading sustained improvement and challenge to all staff and this results in all students making rapid and sustained progress
 - establishing rigorous systems that accurately check and evaluate the college's work and ensure that the outcomes are consistently used by all leaders and managers, including middle leaders, to make rapid and sustained improvements
 - checking that disadvantaged students supported by the government's pupil premium funding receive high calibre support that underpins their progress.

- Improve behaviour across the college by:
 - urgently reviewing the role of the Inclusion Suite in the college's overall approach to behaviour
 - taking urgent steps to reduce the rise in persistent absence, especially that of disadvantaged students
 - making best use of the recently introduced rewards system, so that all students recognise the link between positive behaviour and good quality learning.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that staff take full account of the learning needs of all students, especially the most able and those who are disadvantaged, when they are planning lessons and assessing students' progress
 - improving the consistency and quality of marking so that all students are clear about what they need to do to improve.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the college's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 May 2015

Evidence

During this inspection meetings were held with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, four members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) of governors, the national leader of education (NLE) supporting the college, and a representative of the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) held a meeting with the college staff. Inspectors observed teaching in 13 lessons and part lessons in a range of subjects across the age range of the college and visited the inclusion unit. College documentation, including department reviews, attendance data and the single central record, which contains checks on the appointment of staff, was reviewed.

Context

Fyndoune Community College is part of a federation with a local secondary school. The chief executive of the college is currently not at work. An acting headteacher has oversight of the two colleges with a head of college taking responsibility for the day-to-day work of each. The governing body has been replaced by an IEB and a NLE has been appointed to support leadership within the college. A major restructuring of the senior leadership team of the two colleges in the federation will take effect from September. Plans for the college to become an academy are under consideration.

Achievement of pupils at the school

A far more rigorous system for collecting and analysing data about students' progress is now in place and so the information the college holds about students' achievement is much more robust. As a consequence, the college has been able to intervene rapidly when students have not achieved as well as expected. As a result of this work, along with some improvements in teaching, the proportion of students predicted to achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is expected to rise this year.

Intervention sessions in English and mathematics have begun to overcome gaps in students' knowledge, ensuring that they have a better chance of achieving their potential. The attainment gap between students who are supported by the pupil premium (additional government money) and those who are not is rapidly narrowing due highly effective intervention work with these students.

Across subjects, students make better progress when they are taught well and when their attitudes to learning are positively harnessed. Good progress was evident in some lessons observed by inspectors, but is not yet the case in all classes. In particular, the promotion of literacy across the curriculum remains too variable.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has been a focus for improvement in the college and this work is starting to have an impact on the progress of students. The college has developed a rigorous and more reliable system for collecting and analysing data about students' progress and teachers are now more aware of the potential both of individual students and of groups of students within their classes. In the lessons where good and better learning took place, teachers planned activities that met the needs of different students, but in the majority of lessons this is not the case. There are still too many lessons that are planned to keep students busy, rather than aiming to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, too many activities are pitched at a low level and do not challenge students to develop a deeper understanding of the subject.

The quality and effectiveness of teachers' marking are improving overall. In the best examples seen, teachers identify strengths and targets in students' work and provide guidance to support students' learning. However, in some books mistakes are not identified and the work of many students is still poorly presented. Where teaching is strong, there is good written and verbal feedback from teachers and students' attitudes towards their learning are good. The lessons in which students make best progress were characterised by well-planned and organised activities which engaged and challenged students in their learning.

The expectations of many teachers have been raised. However, more needs to be done to embed improvements and make sure that best practice in teaching is spread across the college.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Rates of attendance have begun to improve since the college introduced tighter procedures for dealing with absence. Parents of absent students are contacted promptly by telephone or text and the college has worked with students and their parents on an individual basis to offer targeted support with appropriate rewards as attendance improves. The awareness of the importance of good attendance among students has been raised throughout the college. This work has led to persistent absence, particularly that of disadvantaged students, declining significantly since the inspection.

The majority of the students are keen to learn. Instances of low-level disruption are rare and only occur when teaching is poor. The work of the inclusion suite is now more closely aligned to the college curriculum. More appropriate support work in this area has reduced the rate of fixed-term exclusions from the college and the numbers of students who spend time in the suite is falling as teaching and support improve.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has received extensive support from both a NLE and representatives of the local authority. Staff from St John's School and Sixth Form College, a local outstanding school, in partnership with the local authority, have carried out a detailed review of each subject department in the college. These reports have been used by department heads to create subject improvement plans. These plans vary in quality; the best include milestones from which progress in improvements can be assessed, whereas weaker plans are more descriptive and concentrate on process rather than better outcomes for students.

The college now has a more robust system for collecting and analysing data about students' progress. This information is both accurate and up to date and has allowed leaders and teachers to intervene rapidly where underperformance is noted, whether with individual students or with different groups of students. This work has already had a significant, positive impact on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

College leaders have not yet securely driven whole-college improvements in teaching. Lesson observations are completed regularly and, as a result, support is in place for some teachers to enable them to improve their teaching. However, information derived from the monitoring of teaching quality has not been used to inform clear actions leading to secure whole-college improvements in teaching. Middle leaders are benefiting from training to enable them to challenge members of staff more but need to be given further responsibility for driving the improvement in the quality of teaching within their areas of responsibility.

The local authority has appointed an IEB and so the external review of governance has not been necessary. The new governors have considerable expertise, are knowledgeable about the college and understand the challenges it faces. They are better able than the previous governing body to challenge college leaders and hold them to account. They ask demanding questions which are increasingly focused on the impact of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and address underachievement. The review of the college's use of pupil premium funding recommended at the last section 5 inspection has been completed.

External support

The local authority has brokered extensive support from a NLE and his school to support leadership within the college. This expertise has been invaluable in empowering college leaders to understand how management systems can be improved and developed. A college scrutiny group, including the NLE, representatives of the local authority and college governors, meets regularly to support and challenge senior leaders.