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Mr Paul Averis
Headteacher
Black Country UTC
Vernon Way
Sneyd Lane
Bloxwich
Walsall
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Dear Mr Averis

Special measures monitoring inspection of Black Country UTC

Following my visit to your college on 1 July 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 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 March 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone call was held with a parent. I also made a number of short visits to lessons and spoke to students. There was no sponsor's statement of action. The college's action plans were evaluated.

Context

Black Country University Technical College (UTC) has specialisms in engineering and science and is sponsored by Walsall College and the University of Wolverhampton. Following the inspection in March 2015, a decision was made by trustees on the 27 March to close the UTC at the end of this academic year. Since then there has been little change to permanent staff but a number of temporary agency staff have left

the college. On the day of the monitoring inspection Year 10 students were not in school; they were participating in an engineering project at Rockingham Raceway.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the decision to close the college was made, the focus of senior leaders and governors has been on ensuring that the closure is orderly and all students are found suitable alternative placements. Walsall College has overseen issues around finance, premises and staffing to allow the Principal and senior leaders to concentrate on supporting students and parents.

Governors and leaders have drawn up effective plans detailing the actions required to close the college. These plans have provided the basis for weekly meetings with officials from the Department for Education and the office of the Regional Schools Commissioner. The plan clearly identifies who is responsible for carrying out actions and there are very specific timescales for completion. Completed tasks are evaluated and highlighted if further actions are required. The great majority of these closure tasks have been completed on time.

The college has taken rapid and appropriate action on courses and examination entries to ensure students are in the best position for transfer to another institution. Year 12 students undertaking engineering as a principal learning pathway have been moved to a BTEC engineering qualification which is studied in a wider range of institutions. Some students in Year 10 have taken mathematics, English and product design qualifications at the end of this year to help with their transition. The Principal has ensured that additional external support to improve the quality of teaching and help students get the best grades has continued.

The college has worked closely with students and parents to ensure they have received appropriate information and support. The notification of closure letter included an offer to attend one of six after-school information sessions. Local colleges, schools, UTCs, training providers and the local authority connexions service provided input into a successful destinations evening and the great majority of students now have an offer of a place. I remain concerned about a small number of students, particularly those in Year 10, who do not yet have a new placement. The college is working with the local authority over the future of these students but this is a situation that now requires urgent action. There is also a longer-term concern to be addressed over who will be accountable for ensuring that all students have taken up their places in September when staff at the UTC are no longer in a position to act as advocates for these students.

Year 10 students have been placed in local schools and academies, as well as other UTCs. Many Year 11 students are moving onto Walsall college or other college or sixth form provision. They are intending to study a range of courses at varying levels and some are moving onto apprenticeships. All but one of the Year 11 students completed mathematics and English GCSE examinations this summer, in addition to a broad range of other qualifications.

College leaders are pleased that two thirds of Year 12 students will continue to study courses in mathematics, science or engineering. However, a group of Year 12 students who are studying a combination of A levels and a vocational engineering course are finding it difficult to find places that will allow them to continue both courses in local provision. As a result, many now have to decide between A levels and vocational pathways.

Year 13 students have been least affected by the closure. They were able to complete their courses and the majority of students have been offered provisional places at university or on apprenticeships, dependent on their examination results.

Leaders and governors have taken rapid action to address the safeguarding concerns raised in the inspection report. A full audit has been undertaken and the outcomes shared with the local authority. Improved systems have been put in place for record keeping and all staff have undergone training on a number of safeguarding issues, including child sexual exploitation and implementing the college's safeguarding policy.

The Chair of the Governing Body has worked very closely with the college since the closure decision was made, bringing in additional staff and resources from Walsall College to manage the closure. Together they have provided support to cancel a planned building programme and manage staff redundancies. They have also ensured the required improvements to safeguarding were made and have supported the academy's work in finding alternative placements for students.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsors did not write a statement of action

The college's action plans are fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Her Majesty's Inspector