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Mrs Alison Jobling
Acting Headteacher
Durham Community Business College for Technology and Enterprise
Bracken Court
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Dear Mrs Jobling

Special measures monitoring inspection of Durham Community Business College for Technology and Enterprise

Following my visit with Malcolm Kirtley, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your college on 10–11 December 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 taken since the college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The college may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

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 the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in order to raise achievement, especially in mathematics, science and the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - the progress made by different groups of students is accurately and regularly checked
 - students' work is accurately assessed and new work enables all groups of students to make rapid progress
 - teachers demand consistently high standards of work from their students
 - all marking and feedback gives helpful guidance by showing students precisely what they must do to improve their work and ensuring they act upon this advice quickly.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that improvement is driven forward rapidly by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders are capable of delivering improvement priorities
 - establishing robust systems to check and evaluate the college's work accurately and ensuring that the outcomes are used consistently by all senior and middle leaders and managers to make rapid improvements
 - ensuring that leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching give high regard to the standards of students' work over time and published performance data on progress and attainment
 - checking that students who are supported by the government's pupil premium funding receive high calibre support that accelerates their progress
 - ensuring that the governing body holds the senior leaders and managers to account for all aspects of the college's performance.

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 third monitoring inspection on 10–11 December 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB) of governors and three other members, middle leaders and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed teaching in 19 lessons and part-lessons in a range of subjects across the age range of the college. College documentation, including department reviews, records of observations of teaching, attendance and exclusions data, and the single central record, which contains checks on the appointment of staff, was reviewed.

Context

Durham Community Business College is part of a federation with a local secondary school. The chief executive of the federation, who had been on long-term absence, has now left the college. A major restructuring of the senior leadership team of the two colleges in the federation took effect in September 2015. The local authority has recently appointed an acting headteacher to support leadership within the college, and the previous acting headteacher has returned to his substantive deputy headteacher position. A deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning has been appointed and will take up post in January. The current head of science is not at work and the acting head of science will leave at the end of this term. The college sixth form closed in September 2015.

The governing body has been replaced by an IEB. Plans for the college to become an academy are under consideration.

Outcomes for pupils

The provisional 2015 examination results show that the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics at grades A* to C has declined for a third consecutive year. In 2014, the college did not meet the government's floor standards for the minimum expectations of attainment and progress at GCSE, and is unlikely to meet the floor standards for 2015 when they are published. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils has not closed, despite the college receiving significant extra funding from the pupil premium to boost their achievement.

The main reason for these weak overall results is that only 39% of pupils made the progress expected of them in mathematics. Progress in science was also very poor. There was, however, a significant improvement in achievement in English: the proportion of pupils making expected progress increased from 45% in 2014 to 70% in 2015; and the proportion of those exceeding expected progress increased from

5% to 32% over the same period. This is a substantial improvement, and in English pupils' rates of progress are now in line with those of their peers nationally, giving a clear indication of what is possible with strong subject leadership and good teaching.

Achievement across the college remains highly inconsistent. The legacy of poor teaching over time, together with teachers' historically inaccurate predictions of pupils' performance and weak senior and middle leadership, indicates the significant challenges that lie ahead to improve standards. There remains an urgent need to ensure that pupils in all classes are taught well so that they make at least the progress expected of them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching remains, correctly, the major focus for improvement in the college. In some areas, most notably in English and in mathematics, this work is having an impact on pupils' achievement, but in other areas, and in particular in science, progress has been far too slow and support has had little effect on teaching and pupils' achievement.

There are still too many lessons that lack pace and challenge and appear planned to keep pupils busy, rather than explicitly focusing on developing their knowledge and skills. As a result, too many activities are pitched at a low level and do not challenge pupils to develop a deeper understanding of the subject. Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving but too many pupils, and some teachers, still believe that good behaviour in lessons involves keeping quiet rather than actively engaging in learning.

Lessons in which pupils make good and better progress are characterised by well-planned and organised activities and a clear enthusiasm for the subject. In these lessons, pupils are fully engaged in challenging activities and are encouraged to develop their own ideas. These qualities were observed in English lessons, in some mathematics lessons and in lessons in art, resistant materials and physical education. Pupils were keen to tell inspectors that their favourite lessons are those which stretch and challenge them, and where the expectations of teachers are high.

The accuracy of teacher assessment continues to improve and teachers are now more aware of data relating to pupils' progress and better understand the needs of the different groups of pupils in their classes. Work in pupils' books shows that most take more pride in the presentation of their work. However, more needs to be done to embed these improvements and ensure that best practice in teaching is spread across the college.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The college appointed an attendance officer at the beginning of the autumn term. Pupils are now more aware of the importance of good attendance and how it relates to their academic outcomes. Where required, the college has worked with pupils and their parents on an individual basis to offer targeted support to improve attendance. Parents of absent pupils are contacted promptly on the first day of absence by telephone or text. Rates of attendance have continued to improve and are now close to the national average. Persistent absence, and particularly that of disadvantaged pupils, is declining.

The work of the inclusion suite is now more closely aligned to the college curriculum and work set is now closely matched to that in the lessons missed. This, together with more effective personal support, has rapidly reduced the rate of fixed-term exclusions from the college and the numbers of pupils who spend time in the suite is falling.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The local authority has acknowledged that the pace of progress in tackling the areas for improvement noted in the inspection report in September 2014 has been too slow and has recognised the urgent need for additional leadership capacity. An experienced full-time acting headteacher has been appointed to the federation to further support senior and middle leaders in both colleges.

The acting headteacher has led a review of each department and ensured that middle leaders now fully understand their roles and what is expected of them. All middle leaders are now linked with a member of the recently restructured senior leadership team. They have produced a detailed analysis of recent outcomes in their subject area and have updated department development plans. Line management meetings happen regularly and middle leaders are being held more accountable for the quality of teaching in their subject area. Some middle leaders are having a greater impact than others and some do not have the necessary skills to drive rapid improvement.

Middle leaders confirm that they are receiving more effective support and are now clear about their positions and what is expected of them. They believe that they now have the support and challenge required to take full responsibility for their roles, although some accept the need to develop further their skills in monitoring the quality and impact of the teaching for which they are responsible. In some subject areas this work is hindered by a lack of coordination between teachers in the two colleges.

The college has developed a more robust system for collecting and analysing information about pupils' progress. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 sit formal examinations twice each year and these are marked by teachers and the papers are moderated by local authority officers. More accurate information allows middle leaders and teachers to intervene rapidly where underperformance is noted, whether with individual pupils or with different groups of pupils.

Members of the IEB have continued to support and challenge college leaders. The federation scrutiny group continues to focus on strategies to improve the quality of teaching and to address significant areas of persistent underachievement.

Plans for the college to become an academy remain under consideration. Senior leaders and members of the IEB are clear that the work involved in this should not distract from the task of improving teaching and raising standards as quickly as possible.

External support

The local authority has provided further support for the leadership of the federation through the appointment of a full-time acting headteacher. Local authority officers have continued to work with middle leaders to develop their leadership skills. The federation scrutiny group meets regularly to support and challenge senior leaders.