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Mrs Alison Jobling
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jobling

Special measures monitoring inspection of Fyndoune Community College

Following my visit with Nigel Drew, Ofsted Inspector, to your college on 1 and 2 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The college may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Executive Board, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Durham County Council.

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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 1 March 2016 to 2 March 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and deputy headteachers, three members of the interim executive board of governors (IEB), middle leaders, members of the college teaching and learning group and two representatives of the local authority, including the head of education. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times during both days of the inspection about the quality of their educational experience and the standard of behaviour in the college. Inspectors visited 21 lessons in a range of subjects across the age range of the college to observe teaching and learning and to consider the progress made by pupils in their books. 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

Fyndoune Community College is part of a federation with a local secondary college. A major restructuring of the senior leadership team of the two colleges in the federation took effect in September. The local authority has appointed a new acting headteacher to support leadership within the college and the previous acting headteacher has returned to his substantive deputy headteacher position. A second deputy headteacher, responsible for teaching and learning, took up post in January.

The governing body has been replaced by an IEB.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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The IEB and the local authority have recognised that the pace of improvement since the inspection in September 2014 was too slow and that additional leadership capacity was required in the college. An experienced, full-time acting headteacher, along with a permanent second deputy headteacher, is now in post and providing highly effective support and challenge both to other members of the senior leadership team and to middle leaders. They have developed a strong partnership and, as a result, there is a developing sense of collective commitment among staff to improving the outcomes for pupils.

All pupils in the college are now set challenging targets and pupil progress is assessed each term. A new information analysis system has been adopted, which clearly highlights the progress of both individuals and groups of pupils. The college has worked with a number of external partners from the local authority and from local schools to moderate and monitor the accuracy of this assessment information. Senior and middle leaders hold regular raising achievement meetings, where the progress of pupils is discussed and support is arranged for those who may be in danger of falling behind. This work is beginning to have a positive impact on the

achievement of all pupils.

Middle leaders are now linked with a member of the recently restructured senior leadership team and each has produced a detailed analysis of outcomes in their subject area and used this to update their department development plan. More robust departmental self-evaluation has created a greater awareness of weaknesses in both the curriculum and in teaching, and has increased the focus on rapid and targeted improvements.

Members of the IEB continue to support and challenge college leaders. The federation scrutiny group continues to focus on strategies to improve the quality of teaching and to address areas of underachievement. Self-evaluation is now accurate and based on a thorough analysis of all relevant information. It identifies the correct priorities for the next stage of the college's development.

Plans for the college to become an academy are still under consideration but a lack of regular progress updates from the potential academy sponsor are a cause of concern. College leaders and members of the IEB are clear that the work involved in this area must not distract from the critical tasks of improving teaching and raising standards within the college.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The appointment, in January, of a new deputy headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning has led to a rapid improvement in teaching throughout the college. A newly established teaching and learning group meets weekly and has developed a simplified lesson-planning scheme used by teachers in all curriculum areas. The group is now updating the college marking policy. One teacher commented that, 'teachers are now involved in changes, improvement is not something done to us'. All teachers are supported through a targeted and individual development programme. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work confirm that standards are rising as teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving increase. The quality of teaching remains, correctly, the major focus for improvement in the college.

The accuracy of teacher assessment has improved 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. Marking of pupils' work follows the college policy and is now more effective at ensuring that pupils understand what they have learned and what they need to do to improve. Work in books shows that pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics, and across a range of other subjects, and that most now take more pride in the presentation of their work. The college is aware that more needs to be done to embed these improvements and ensure that best practice in teaching continues to spread across the college.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

College records confirm that the number of serious behaviour incidents has decreased significantly since the previous inspection. Pupils are taught about different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying, and know what to do if they witness or experience it. They report that incidents of bullying are now very low.

Pupils have a clear understanding of what makes an unsafe situation and, for example, are able to talk knowledgeably about online safety and the potential dangers of using social media. The college promotes tolerance of others and safety through an effective programme of citizenship lessons and regular assemblies.

The work of the attendance officer, together with a more systematic approach to monitoring pupil absence, has led to continued improvements in attendance. Persistent absence, in particular that of disadvantaged students, is declining rapidly. Attendance is currently close to the national average for secondary schools.

The work of the Apex inclusion suite is closely aligned to the college curriculum. This, together with better teaching throughout the college and more targeted support in the inclusion suite, has significantly reduced the number of fixed-term exclusions from the college and the numbers of students who spend time in the suite is falling.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2015 the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics at grades A* to C, declined for a third consecutive year. In English only 48% of pupils made the progress expected of them, a substantial decline from 72% the previous year. Students' achievement in mathematics also declined compared to the 2014 results, with a 7% fall in the proportion making expected progress. The proportions of pupils making more than expected progress was well below that expected in both English and mathematics. Gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils at the college and other pupils nationally remained stubbornly large.

As a result of improvements to teaching, outcomes for pupils in all year groups are rising. Observations of teaching, evidence from pupils' books and discussions with pupils confirm that they are making better progress in all areas of the curriculum. The college's most recent analysis of assessment information, moderated by representatives of the local authority, indicates that the achievement of all pupils, including those supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding), will rise significantly this year.

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.