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Dear Mrs Lovell

Special measures monitoring inspection of UTC Plymouth

Following my visit with Diana Denman, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Christine Lacey, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 24–25 May 2017, 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2016.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring the suitable delegation of key tasks and responsibilities, and supporting leaders in developing the skills and confidence to carry out their roles effectively
 - making sure staff at all levels are accountable for the quality and impact of their work
 - putting in place a rigorous and coherent approach to improving the quality of teaching and ensuring a rapid response to weaknesses identified
 - devising and implementing a sharply focused improvement plan, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make more rapid progress
 - making sure that governors play a full and effective part in bringing about improvement.

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, including in the sixth form, by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations, including of how pupils present and complete their work
 - identifying the needs of different groups of pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - using assessment information more effectively to identify underachievement and taking swift and effective action in response
 - making sure that work is challenging enough to enable pupils to reach higher standards
 - maintaining a strong focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills.

- Improve the curriculum by:
 - making sure that all pupils are following courses and programmes best suited to their needs and aspirations
 - producing a planned and coherent programme to promote British values and to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development more effectively.

- Improve the quality and breadth of advice, guidance and support so that pupils throughout the school are aware of the range of opportunities available to them.

- Improve behaviour so that pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 May 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the chair of the local governing body, senior and middle leaders, other staff, pupils and parents. Inspectors visited lessons and examined a range of pupils' work in order to assess the progress they are making. In addition, inspectors talked to representatives of those organisations currently providing external support to UTC Plymouth, including other schools, the Baker Dearing Trust, the armed services and local employers.

Context

UTC Plymouth is undergoing a period of considerable change. Leaders have decided not to admit pupils into Year 10 for 2017–18. Coupled with lower expected recruitment in Year 12, this means that the anticipated number on roll next year will fall from 150 to approximately 90. This will leave UTC Plymouth operating at 15% of its capacity of 600. The school was already facing serious financial constraints, which these falling pupil numbers have exacerbated. This has led to a round of redundancies that has reduced the number of teachers by half. In addition, the current principal will leave at the end of this academic year to take up another post. In October an experienced head of English was appointed to lead the school's drive to improve literacy. The governing body has been substantially reconstructed since the previous inspection, with a new chair of governors. Governors are actively looking into the possibility of joining a multi-academy trust in order to secure the long-term future of the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new principal, who took over shortly before the previous inspection, has acted with determination to improve the work of the UTC. She has demonstrated perseverance and resilience when faced with constraints, including financial, that have placed the school under additional pressures. The leadership team has been remodelled with the aim of creating a smaller but more effective team. The vice-principal plays an important role in this new structure, and she too is determined that the school will succeed.

The reduction in the size of the leadership team means that increased importance is now placed on the work of middle leaders. Recent appointments, such as a new head of English, and the successful development of those middle leaders already in post, mean that middle leadership in the school is now growing in strength. Middle leaders have embraced the recent changes and welcome their increased responsibility, understanding that they are accountable for pupils' progress. Accountability for outcomes has been enhanced by the introduction of a more

effective system of monitoring pupils' progress. Leaders have placed a greater emphasis on the regular and accurate assessment of what pupils can and cannot do. There is now an established system whereby assessment information is interrogated by leaders and teachers together. This leads to appropriate adaptations of teaching and the curriculum, with the aim that no pupil or groups of pupils are allowed to fall behind.

The external review of governance recommended at the previous inspection was undertaken in June 2016, but the governors had already acted swiftly to improve the capacity of the governing body. Substantial changes to the make-up and structure of the governing body have increased its capacity to act as a 'challenging friend' to school leaders. The new chair of governors brings extensive experience of governance in the public and private sector to his role and he has a very good understanding of what governance in a university technical college entails and requires. Other governors have brought experience of important sectors to the governing body, such as higher education, industry and the armed services. They, too, are adding considerable capacity to the governing body. Governors have established an executive board, smaller in size than the full governing body, which meets on a monthly basis to ensure that the momentum of the drive for improvement is maintained. One area for development from the previous inspection required that UTC Plymouth should ensure that 'governors play a full and effective part in bringing about improvement'. This they are now doing. In addition, governors, along with school leaders, are actively exploring the options open to the UTC to become part of multi-academy trust. They believe that this is the best way to put the future of the UTC on a secure footing. In this process they are working closely with the regional schools commissioner and the Baker Dearing Educational Trust.

Changes in the school leadership and governance structures are symptomatic of a wider change in the school's culture. Leaders, governors and staff are much more outward looking now. They proactively seek support from other schools and organisations, forging stronger links with the wider community. This move from insularity to greater openness has been a key element in securing and building greater capacity to carry out school improvement. Another feature of this outward-looking approach is the increased work that middle leaders and classroom teachers are doing with colleagues in other schools. For example, moderation and standardisation of pupils' work with other schools have increased teachers' understanding of what good progress looks like. The challenge the school faces now is to ensure that the re-organisation of leadership at all levels and this collaborative work with other institutions pays off in substantial and sustained improvements in pupils' academic outcomes.

After the previous inspection in April 2016, the school submitted a statement of action that was judged to be not fit for purpose. This document has now been revised and provides a much clearer response to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Planned actions are now more specific and

success criteria are clearer. The statement of action also provides an ongoing plan for further improvement and is being used effectively as a working document by senior and middle leaders.

The external review of the use of the pupil premium recommended at the time of the previous inspection took place in October 2016. This led to the creation of an action plan which the school has followed through with regular review and evaluation. Nonetheless, the school's evaluation of its use of the pupil premium does not fully meet requirements. In particular, the pupil premium strategy published on the school's website does not outline clearly enough how the school will use its pupil premium allocation for 2016–17. In addition, while the leadership team is paying greater attention to analysing outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, it has some way to go before that analysis is detailed and sophisticated enough to promote rapid improvement. For example, analysis of the performance of groups within the school's disadvantaged cohort, such as those disadvantaged pupils who also have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is lacking.

Governors and school leaders have made a decision to focus the curriculum on courses related to the UTC's core area of vocational engineering. Vehicle technology has been introduced in key stage 4, which is proving popular with pupils. On the other hand, this focus on vocational engineering has led to a reduction in the number of academic qualifications available in the sixth form. From 2017–18, the only A level offered will be mathematics. While this could be seen as a narrowing of the curriculum on offer, it actually represents a better recognition of which courses are most appropriate for the interests and aptitudes of students currently in the school.

Improved careers education means that pupils are following programmes more suited to their needs. In the sixth form, 16 to 19 study programmes meet requirements and include meaningful non-qualification activity and relevant work placements.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school's work to promote British values and to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was found wanting. There is a much clearer programme in place now and inspectors witnessed, for example, activities in tutor time aimed at developing pupils' understanding of and readiness for life in modern Britain. Nonetheless, pupils' knowledge and understanding of fundamental British values are not yet typically secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is now characterised by higher expectations of what pupils can attain and the progress they can make. There is also evidence in some subjects of a higher degree of challenge in the work that pupils are being set. This is uneven, however, across the school as whole. Similarly inconsistent are pupils' responses to the

school's higher expectations of presentation and completion of work. While many pupils are rising to meet these expectations, a significant proportion of books are still untidily presented, with missing or incomplete work.

Teachers are now using assessment information more thoroughly to identify underachievement and to take steps in response. Teachers use assessment information to identify gaps in learning or pupils who are at risk of falling behind. In discussion with senior leaders, this leads to targeted activity to tackle any problems that are identified, which is followed up and monitored in subsequent discussions. As a consequence, the ability of teaching to meet the needs of the pupils is improving. All the staff that inspectors spoke to were very positive about the impact that this new approach was having on their teaching and their drive to improve outcomes.

The school's ability to identify the needs of different groups of pupils is improving. For example, the special educational needs coordinator has increased the precision with which pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified. This allows for the more targeted use of additional funding and helps teachers to meet the needs of these pupils both in and outside lessons.

Given the substantial changes the school is undergoing, inspectors recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

At the previous inspection in 2016 some pupils' attitudes to learning were poor. Since then, attitudes to learning across the school have begun to improve, a fact which pupils themselves recognise. For example, pupils in Year 10 talked of how their engagement with learning and enjoyment of education had improved markedly since joining UTC Plymouth at the start of the year. Students in Year 13 are much happier now, due to recent improvements in the quality of education in the sixth form, particularly valuing the work to develop their employability.

Behaviour is improving. At the start of the year, the school admitted a significant number of pupils who displayed challenging behaviour. School leaders worked hard to address this. The curriculum was adapted to match it more closely to the needs of pupils by, for example, introducing courses in vehicle technology and media studies. In addition a new reward system was introduced with the express aim of developing more positive attitudes to learning. As a result of these initiatives, pupils' attitudes to learning and self-esteem have improved, which has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of recorded behavioural incidents since the start of the year.

Rates of absence and persistent absence are too high, although school leaders are taking all reasonable steps to improve them. The school works very closely with its educational welfare officer to promote better attendance and to address any

safeguarding concerns that persistent absence might raise. At the time of the previous inspection, shortcomings were noted in the way attendance information was collected in the sixth form. These shortcomings remain, although leaders increasingly recognise the need to improve this aspect of the school's work.

Outcomes for pupils

The results of the public examinations taken by pupils shortly after the previous inspection confirmed that academic outcomes at UTC Plymouth were inadequate. At key stage 4 the school was below the government's floor target for overall progress. While results in mathematics were broadly in line with the national average, progress in English was very poor, especially for disadvantaged pupils. School leaders have taken action to address this, with a particular focus on developing literacy across the curriculum.

In October 2016, leaders appointed a new English lead with responsibility also for literacy. This has had a positive impact on standards in English in key stage 4. The work in pupils' books shows that they are now making better progress, especially the most able, who are developing greater fluency in their writing. The impact of this work on pupils with very low starting points is less clear. In terms of wider literacy, there are signs that pupils are developing this aspect of their learning, not just in English but across the curriculum – for example in information technology. While initial indications are positive, therefore, these initiatives will take time to embed and to result in substantial and sustained improvements in pupils' academic outcomes.

The development of employability and work-related learning are particularly strong elements of students' 16 to 19 study programmes. As a result, all students who left the sixth form in 2016 went on to higher or further education, apprenticeships or employment. Current students recognise the improvements in developing their employability and this is a key factor behind improving attitudes to learning, especially in Year 13.

External support

The school has received significant support from a number of other schools and organisations. The school is working particularly closely with Stoke Damerel Community College, funded by a UTC support grant from the Department for Education. This external support has led to increased capacity at all levels of leadership and improvements in the quality of teaching. The Baker Dearing Educational Trust is providing support to the school, especially in relation to any potential move to join a multi-academy trust. Links with local employers are strong and this enhances pupils' work-related learning and gives them a wide range of opportunities for work experience.