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Mrs Polly Lovell
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Dear Mrs Lovell

Special measures monitoring inspection of UTC Plymouth

Following my visit with Christine Lacey, Julie Nash and Shelagh Pritchard, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 5–6 December 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2016. 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 school's action plan is fit for purpose.

I recommend that the school does not 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 second monitoring inspection on 5 December 2017 to 6 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, vice principal and other staff. They talked with groups of pupils to find out about their experience of the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. Inspectors visited lessons in all year groups and examined pupils' work.

Context

UTC Plymouth continues to undergo a period of substantial change and adjustment. No pupils were admitted to Year 10 in 2017. The school's roll has fallen further as a consequence. It now stands at 75, a very low number considering the school's maximum capacity is 600. The majority of learners (approximately 60%) are in the post-16 provision, following 16 to 19 study programmes.

Since the last visit, half the staff have been made redundant as a result of the school's falling roll and its persistent, although reducing, financial deficit. In addition, other staff left, including all the mathematics teachers. The school has recruited a new mathematics teacher and is sharing a science teacher with a local secondary school. At the time of the first monitoring visit, the principal had announced her intention to resign and take up another post. Since then, however, she has reconsidered that decision and remains the permanent principal of the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal continues to display a determination to ensure that the school succeeds in the face of the continuing challenging circumstances. In this, she is well supported by the members of the school's senior leadership team.

This team has been remodelled: it now consists of the principal, vice principal, the heads of key stages 4 and 5 and the head of engineering. Some senior leaders, however, have very wide-ranging portfolios of responsibilities. This is limiting the impact of the school's improvement work in places, such as improving the school's work to promote fundamental British values. Pupils are now better prepared for life in modern Britain than they were at the time of the inspection that resulted in the school becoming subject to special measures, but this work requires further embedding for it to be secure.

Governors and school leaders are in the final stages of seeking to gain approval from the regional schools commissioner and the Department for Education to join a

local multi-academy trust. They regard this as the best way to secure the school's long-term future. Governors have a very clear understanding of the situation the school is currently in and the plan to join a multi-academy trust is a well-thought-through strategic decision.

Leadership of the post-16 provision is strong. It ensures that students achieve good academic outcomes and are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. This effective leadership has resulted in this aspect of the school's work making the quickest and most secure improvement since the school became subject to special measures.

The 16 to 19 study programmes meet the requirements. These programmes include meaningful non-qualification activity and vocationally relevant work placements. Engagement with local employers remains a significant strength of the post-16 provision and has been further developed. Most BTEC units, for example, now have an element of employer engagement and/or work-related study. For example, projects are provided by local employers and the Royal Navy.

Post-16 leaders work closely with local industries and employers to identify and meet skills gaps. The introduction of new industrial qualifications has enhanced the curriculum further and is designed to meet the needs of local employers who require employees with developed fabrication and hand skills (such as welding). These courses also provide an effective route into level 3 apprenticeships for students who are not ready to go straight on to such programmes.

School leaders are improving the analysis of the impact of additional funding such as the pupil premium. Leaders are clearer now about what initiatives have worked in the past and which have not. This is allowing them to target this funding more effectively. Having completed a review of the way the pupil premium is used in October 2016, the school has commissioned further reviews and another one is in the pipeline. This is testament to the seriousness with which leaders take this aspect of their work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching on engineering courses is strong, especially in the sixth form, and pupils make good progress as a result. Teaching develops pupils' ability to work well together, for example on their BTEC projects, and this helps to enhance their employability.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in other subjects, especially in key stage 4, remains too inconsistent. For the most able pupils, teaching in mathematics is providing a good level of challenge and all these pupils will be entered for further mathematics GCSE. For other pupils in mathematics and all pupils in English and science, however, teachers' expectations and the degree of challenge that pupils face are too variable. As a result, the impact of teaching on promoting better

progress is inconsistent. In other subjects, such as vehicle technology and Spanish, pupils make better progress as a result of more consistently effective teaching.

Where teaching is most effective, it is characterised by ongoing formal and informal assessment to ensure that pupils make progress. For example, when effective, questioning is used well to assess, probe and develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. As elsewhere, however, the challenge for the school is to ensure that this good practice is embedded across the school as a whole.

The learning support team, which comprises a higher level teaching assistant and a learning support assistant, provides effective support for those pupils whose literacy and numeracy skills are not yet strong enough. They know their pupils well and understand what help they need to enable them to improve their writing and mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

School leaders' work to improve attendance has resulted in a notable reduction in the rates of absence. Systems for recording and following up any absence have improved. As a result, overall attendance is now much closer to the national average. The rate of persistent absence has reduced by half and is below 20%. While this is still too high, it is a significant improvement in a relatively short period of time. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils also shows marked improvement.

The new approach to behaviour management that was introduced shortly before the school's first monitoring visit continues to have a positive impact on improving pupils' conduct. One indicator of this is that the number of fixed-term exclusions has dropped steeply, by approximately 60%. Nonetheless, low level disruption or disengagement from learning is still seen relatively frequently, especially in more formal classroom-based lessons in key stage 4. Behaviour and engagement are better in practical, vocational lessons.

Attitudes to learning in the post-16 provision are more positive than in key stage 4. Post-16 students feel well supported and enjoy their studies. They value the teaching they receive and believe they benefit greatly from the industrial expertise of the engineering teachers. The majority of sixth-form students are focused on their learning and have aspirational goals. By contrast, a larger proportion of pupils in Year 11 have yet to acquire the characteristics of successful learners. Most notably, many lack the resilience to persist with tricky work and give up too easily. In conversation, these pupils can talk clearly about the positive impact the school has had on them but they do not always translate this into consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Academic outcomes on the 16 to 19 study programmes are very strong. The

school's largest course is level 3 BTEC engineering and in 2016–17, all students passed this qualification. Most notably, 47% achieved the highest possible grade, a triple distinction star (D*D*D*). In addition, those students who needed to improve their grades in level 2 English and/or mathematics made much better progress than the national average.

As a result of the strong progress they make, post-16 students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. All the students from 2017's Year 13 cohort went on to appropriate destinations.

On the face of it, 2017 outcomes at key stage 4 were poor. However, there are important contextual factors that need to be taken into account in order to provide a truer picture of progress. Many pupils arrive in Year 10 (or later) with histories of highly disrupted education. Some have not been attending full-time education for a significant period. They have often made little or no progress in Years 7 to 9 at other educational settings. As a result, on arrival at the school, they are attaining at a much lower level than one would expect. The school helps them to make progress from these low starting points. Pupils all go on to suitable courses at post-16, either at UTC Plymouth or elsewhere.

External support

The school continues to work closely with local schools, including through sharing staff. The school is also working with the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, especially in relation to the school's potential entry into a multi-academy trust. The school receives support from local employers and the Royal Navy in order to enhance pupils' work-related learning. The school is continuing to carry out external reviews of its use of the pupil premium in order to improve the effectiveness with which this additional funding is used.