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22 February 2018

Alison Jobling  
Headteacher  
Durham Community Business College for Technology and Enterprise  
Bracken Court  
Ushaw Moor  
Durham

DH7 7NG

Dear Mrs Jobling

### **No formal designation inspection of Durham Community Business College for Technology and Enterprise**

Following my visit to your school on 23–24 January 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned that the proposed academy conversion had not been brokered, despite the judgement that the school required special measures in September 2014. The school had received four Ofsted monitoring inspections after being placed in special measures, the last of which took place in April 2016. The focus of the inspection was to evaluate the impact of the actions taken by leaders to address the areas for improvement identified in the last section 5 inspection and the progress made by leaders since the last monitoring inspection.

### **Evidence**

I met with you, senior leaders, faculty leaders and the school business manager. I also met a representative of the local education authority and three members of the interim executive board (IEB) set up to replace the previous governing body. I held meetings with two groups of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons and around the school site. I scrutinised a range of documents, including checks on the suitability of staff to work with children, the school improvement plan, minutes of IEB meetings and information regarding pupils' attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

### **Context**

The headteacher was permanently appointed in May 2017, having previously been appointed as acting headteacher in December 2015. A deputy headteacher left the school in July 2017. A director of teaching and learning was appointed in September 2017. The leadership team has been restructured, with a smaller and more tightly focused team of leaders holding responsibilities across the two schools in the federation. There are plans for additional appointments to the leadership team in the spring term. A new system of faculty leadership was introduced in September 2017. The IEB, which first met in April 2015 to replace the previous governing body, is still in place. The vice-chair of the IEB took up responsibilities as chair in September 2017.

The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school and numbers have fallen since the last inspection. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is above average, as is the proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium.

The school received an academy order in October 2015. The proposed conversion with the preferred sponsor did not take place. Subsequent sponsors were not found. This has created additional uncertainty that has slowed down the pace of improvement and made staff recruitment more difficult.

### **Inspection findings**

The inspection report in September 2014 listed two main areas for improvement. These were to urgently improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, particularly in mathematics and science, and to urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management. Leaders have introduced stronger systems to monitor standards, support improvements in teaching and to hold leaders and teachers to account. However, their actions have not secured the improvements in teaching and learning to secure better outcomes at the end of key stage 4.

Leaders have carried out considerable structural change. They have worked strenuously with the IEB and local authority to improve financial and organisational stability. A series of staffing restructures have taken place and leadership roles have been realigned. Senior leaders have brought stability to staffing this academic year, after a substantial period of change, involving a significant turnover of staff. Senior leaders and members of the IEB have tried a number of strategies to boost

recruitment as gaps in staffing had a negative impact upon pupils' outcomes in 2017. Their actions have often been frustrated by outside factors, including staffing shortages in core subjects and the uncertainty over academy conversion. Leaders have commissioned additional consultants to address shortages in particular areas, such as mathematics.

In 2017, pupils made significantly weaker progress than other pupils nationally across a wide range of subjects. The improvements anticipated in science and mathematics at the time of the school's last monitoring report have not occurred, with progress and attainment in these subjects significantly weaker than that seen nationally. In addition, progress in English was also significantly low and in the bottom 10% of schools nationally.

There are signs, in some subjects, that progress for current pupils is improving. Strengths are apparent in subjects such as art, geography and health and social care, where ambitious planning, high expectations and effective assessment are supporting improving progress. Pupils were seen responding enthusiastically in French, where swift pacing and high levels of interaction encouraged effective learning. In the best science books and folders, work is pitched more appropriately and assessment is beginning to improve progress. However, there are still differences within and between core subjects, particular in mathematics, where actions to improve progress have been much less effective.

Faculty leaders have worked with local authority advisers to moderate standards and improve the accuracy of assessment. Local authority advisers led a series of moderation visits in March and April 2017. At these visits, advisers found that assessment was in a number of instances too generous. As underachievement had not been identified early enough, leaders were unable to make timely changes to support improvement. Leaders have subsequently reviewed 2017 outcomes and are implementing changes to the curriculum, teaching and assessment to improve outcomes. Leaders now place an increasing emphasis on formal standardised assessments. They also insist that teachers provide information on pupils' current performance, rather than predictions of where they may be in the future. These actions are leading to improving assessment practice but were too late to arrest the weak outcomes in 2017.

Senior leaders have introduced more rigorous plans to improve the quality of teaching. The deputy headteacher's work in this area has been boosted by the appointment of a director of learning in September 2017. A professional learning programme is in place across the federation, combining generic approaches to teaching and learning with subject-specific activities. Common planning formats have been introduced across the school. Teachers are now using information on pupils' ability to pitch work more effectively. There is an increasing emphasis on providing pupils with more challenging work. Lesson observations show that these systems are used consistently across the school, although variability remains in how

effectively they are used.

While leaders have developed higher expectations and stronger systems for planning and assessment, they have been less successful in equipping teaching teams with the subject expertise to cope with more challenging examinations. Leaders did provide opportunities for teachers to deepen their knowledge of new subject specifications and to visit other schools to develop their expertise. On occasions, their efforts have been undermined by staff absence. Teaching in English, mathematics and science did not enable pupils to make improving progress in 2017, with outcomes significantly below those seen nationally. While stronger systems are in place and staffing is stable, standards remain variable.

Leaders are tracking the progress of disadvantaged pupils more closely. Disadvantaged pupils are prioritised for meetings with careers advisers and at parents' evenings. The 'meeting expectations team' has established a stronger focus on pupils' wider needs. School progress information shows some diminishing of differences for current pupils. However, disadvantaged pupils made much weaker progress than their peers in many areas at the end of key stage 4 in 2017. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved new threshold measures in English and mathematics was significantly below that seen nationally.

Although welfare was not a main area for improvement at the last inspection, leaders have improved standards of care and support for pupils. The 'meeting expectations team', led by the director of welfare, has coordinated a range of support strategies. Leaders have introduced an attendance bus that visits non-attenders on the day of absence to bring them to school and carry out conversations with families. Through systematic monitoring and stronger pupil and family support, rates of attendance have improved for all pupils. Leaders have developed the counselling expertise of their own staff, and commissioned support from professionals, including a mental health nurse, to enhance social and emotional support. Rates of fixed-term exclusion have reduced and are now in line with that seen nationally. The school's internal isolation facility, Apex, showed an increase in pupils removed from lessons in 2016/17, as leaders imposed higher standards and expectations. As these new expectations have become established, behaviour has improved and fewer pupils are being withdrawn from lessons.

Leaders are also taking action to improve provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. A new leader for SEN (SENCo) is part of the meeting expectations team that oversees pupils' wider welfare. This is enabling her to develop a broader and more cohesive understanding of pupils' needs. New systems are in place to diagnose needs and track the impact of support. Parents, carers and pupils have more regular opportunities to review their progress and the effect of support.

Leaders take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. The director of welfare and her wider team are trained in child protection. Leaders have developed effective systems to address pupils' welfare and work with external counsellors,

social workers and healthcare professionals to support pupils' needs. Leaders pursue concerns over pupils' welfare and record them appropriately. Through assemblies and themed curriculum days, teachers address topics that develop pupils' awareness of personal safety and welfare.

The IEB has worked assiduously to hold leaders to account. They demonstrate considerable moral purpose and commitment to the school, with their initial planned support for a term in April 2015 now extended to almost three years. They meet regularly to review and question progress. Their work has led to improvements in staffing as they use performance management much more rigorously, linking pay progression to challenging performance objectives. Some aspects of their work have been frustrated by the uncertainty over academy conversion and by difficulties in recruitment.

### **External support**

The local authority has committed considerable support to the school over a period of uncertainty. They have provided support for new leaders and opportunities to moderate standards. When staffing appointments have proved challenging, the local authority has provided more direct teaching support. They have worked with teachers to develop their teaching expertise. The school has also commissioned work from other consultants to add additional capacity, such as a team currently working with pupils to address underachievement in mathematics. Leaders have also visited, and worked with, colleagues from a variety of schools to develop practice. While this work has helped to develop professional dialogue and promote a stronger learning culture, it has not had a significant effect on improving pupil outcomes at the end of Year 11.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Accelerate improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in English, mathematics and science, to rapidly improve pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 4.
- Intensify actions to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, so that the improvements in their attendance and welfare are reflected in improvements in their academic progress.
- Develop the expertise of new middle leaders so that they are better equipped to support their teams in addressing more challenging examination specifications.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley

**Her Majesty's Inspector**