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Liam McDaid
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Dear Mr McDaid

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bolton UTC

Following my visit to your college on 11 and 12 December 2018, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017. 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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim management committee (IMC), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bolton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017

- Undertake a review of governance.
- Improve the capacity of the governing body to:
 - fully embrace the culture of a UTC
 - accurately evaluate the performance of the college through objective analysis
 - hold leaders, including the chief executive officer (CEO), rigorously to account for the quality of education provided by the college
 - show integrity in the recruitment of new pupils.
- Ensure that college leaders and managers are given time throughout the week to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make by:
 - improving the accuracy with which teachers evaluate the achievement of their pupils
 - ensuring that teachers use their understanding of what their pupils already understand and can do to plan learning activities that better meet pupils' needs
 - ensuring that leaders give support to those teachers whose work is not good enough
 - ensuring that, as a priority, teachers who are timetabled to teach a class do so without being redirected to other activities.
- Ensure that pupils start courses that are appropriate, based on their prior attainment as well as their career aspirations.
- Improve the effectiveness of safeguarding by ensuring that procedures include:
 - a full and accurate record of what has been done to ensure the safeguarding of individuals
 - a full and accurate description of what needs to be done, by whom and by when to ensure the safeguarding of individuals
 - regular and frequent reviews of each pupil's case to ensure that all staff and external agencies are doing what is expected of them.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11 to 12 December 2018

Evidence

The inspector held meetings with the acting principal, other senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and the chair of the IMC. The inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust. In addition, the inspector held informal discussions with pupils during lessons and social times.

The inspector carried out observations of learning and looked at pupils' work in a wide range of subjects. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. A range of documentation was also examined, including the college improvement plan, records of visits by external advisers, and information on safeguarding, pupils' achievement and attendance.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, two teachers have left the college. No new teachers have been appointed. Some changes to the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team have been made to improve accountability. The assistant principal for careers now leads on pupils' outcomes. The special educational needs coordinator, who is a member of the senior leadership team, leads the mathematics department.

The IMC is actively seeking to join a multi-academy trust (MAT). The IMC has been strengthened by the addition of a member with experience of school leadership.

Last year, consultants from Star Academies carried out a review of the key stage 4 provision and provided support and challenge for a number of departments. A senior leader from The Fallibroome Academy, which is a teaching school, carried out a review of the college's assessment systems in December 2018.

The college's roll has declined further and stands at 159. It has capacity for 600 pupils.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting principal is passionately committed to the success of the college. He is well supported by his staff team and governors. Leaders have continued to build on the improvements seen in the last monitoring visit. They have sharpened many aspects of the college's improvement plan. However, some aspects of self-evaluation are overly optimistic.

Staff feel that the college is moving in the right direction. One teacher commented: 'We can see that changes are being made for the children's sake.' Senior leaders

ensure that staff have opportunities to visit each other's lessons and share good practice. Staff say that they are well supported and welcome the professional development that they receive to improve their practice.

Members of the IMC provide more effective challenge to senior and middle leaders through regular meetings with them. Minutes of the IMC's meetings show that members ask probing questions of leaders. For example, they are questioning the accuracy of some of the information that they have had in the past about pupils' progress.

Leaders have continued to take steps to improve the reliability and accuracy of assessment information. Leaders carry out moderation of pupils' work within the college and with other local schools. A review of pupils' books shows that teachers' assessments are more closely aligned to what pupils' know and can do. However, some variation in the accuracy of assessments remain.

Leaders at all levels have responded well to the support and training provided by Star Academies. Middle leaders say that they are held more accountable by senior leaders and governors. Middle leaders are continuing to develop their leadership skills. They are gaining greater confidence in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas. Middle leaders are reviewing and improving schemes of work to ensure that the curriculum on offer is more appropriate to pupils' needs. The recently appointed strategic leader for mathematics has introduced a range of new strategies that are beginning to improve teaching and learning in this subject.

Pupils said that they enjoy using the college's dental, medical and robotics engineering equipment during enrichment lessons. They spoke positively about the opportunity to design, build and race an electric car, which was sponsored by a national company. This helped pupils to develop their team working skills.

Leaders have improved the careers strategy. Actions are underpinned by clear timescales so that progress can be evaluated more carefully. Pupils and students are provided with impartial careers advice and have more opportunities for work experience. Consequently, a higher proportion of pupils and students go on to places in education, training or employment that match their career aspirations.

The culture of safeguarding at the college is strong. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils and students are detailed and up to date. Staff receive relevant training. Pupils said that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff would deal quickly with any issues. An increasing number of pupils join during the college year. They are helped to settle in quickly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are indications that the quality of teaching is improving, although there

remains some unevenness across some subjects. Senior leaders have introduced 'non-negotiables' for teaching, which are typically being adopted by staff in a bid to raise their teaching practice and ensure uniform approaches across the college. This common set of expectations is valued by staff and pupils. Pupils say that teaching and behaviour in lessons have improved. They told the inspector that teachers expect more of them and set homework regularly.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. Some teachers use this well to ask effective questions which explore and develop pupils' understanding. There is evidence that more teachers are using assessment information more effectively to plan learning that matches pupils' abilities. However, despite these positive signs some pupils, including the most able, are not receiving enough challenge to help them to achieve as well as they could.

Most teachers provide pupils with feedback in line with the college's revised marking policy. There is, however, evidence that the new guidelines are not being followed as consistently as leaders expect.

The development of pupils' literacy skills now has a higher profile across the college. Leaders are focusing on developing pupils' vocabulary and writing skills. However, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their speaking skills, where appropriate. Plans to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum are still at an early stage.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The college is a calm and orderly environment. Pupils conduct themselves well between lessons and during social times. In lessons, pupils are compliant and generally work hard. They support each other well. There are strong relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff. Leaders have recently introduced a system of mentoring for all pupils to help them improve their learning. Pupils appreciate this extra level of support.

Leaders are working hard to improve the attendance of all pupils. The overall rate of attendance for 2017/18 was close to the national average for secondary schools. Nonetheless, the rate of persistent absence increased in 2017/18 compared to the previous year and was above the national average. Leaders work closely with parents and carers when they have concerns about a pupil's absence. Leaders and staff have had some success in improving rates of attendance of individual pupils. However, disadvantaged pupils still do not attend as regularly as they should.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional results for Year 11 in 2018 indicate that pupils did not make good progress from their key stage 2 starting points in a range of subjects. Pupils' progress in mathematics declined. Disadvantaged pupils made weaker progress

than other pupils nationally in 2018. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils improved compared to that in 2017.

Since pupils start in Year 10, using national published information to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning over time would be misleading. Leaders have improved the accuracy of baseline assessments. Leaders' own information shows that many pupils arrive in Year 10 having made little progress in key stage 3 during their previous schooling. Inspection evidence shows that outcomes are beginning to improve against the school's own baseline of starting points. However, the attainment and progress of pupils currently in the college remain variable across subjects, including in English and mathematics. The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Published value-added data for Year 13 students in 2018 is not a true reflection of their progress on academic and vocational courses. This is because published data does not include all the students in the cohort enrolled at the college. The college's own information for sixth-form results in 2018 indicates that students continue to do well on vocational courses, such as health and social care and applied science. Students on academic courses made better progress in 2018 than those students who sat similar examinations in 2017. Nevertheless, some students did not achieve the A-level grade of which they are capable, particularly in subjects with large numbers of students such as A-level biology and psychology.

A review of students' work and current assessment information shows that some students in the sixth form are not achieving as well as they should across a range of academic subjects. Leaders are using a range of strategies to improve attainment and progress in the sixth form, such as additional support sessions.

Retention rates on courses in the sixth form were low in the past. Many students were not following appropriate courses. This was partly due to a legacy of weak careers information and advice. Leaders have tightened up entry requirements and improved careers advice and guidance. As a result, a larger proportion of students are continuing with their programmes of studies through the sixth form.

External support

Last year, the college received strong support from Star Academies, through a 'school-to-school' support programme. The IMC has recently brokered effective support from The Fallibroome Academy, an outstanding school in Macclesfield. College leaders and members of the IMC are working with the Baker Dearing Educational Trust in relation to Bolton UTC's potential entry into a MAT.