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12 September 2023

Donald Cumming  
Acting Headteacher  
Denton Community College  
Taylor Lane  
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Manchester  
Lancashire  
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Dear Mr Cumming

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Denton Community College**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 12 and 13 July 2023 on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in December 2022.

During the inspection, Rochelle Conefrey, Ofsted Inspector, and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) and other representatives of the multi-academy trust (MAT) currently providing support to the school, members of the interim executive board (IEB), other staff, and representatives of the local authority, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection.

We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also met with pupils and reviewed a range of documentation provided by leaders. We have considered all this in coming to our judgement.

**Denton Community College remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.**

**The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

## **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

In recent months, you have taken up your post as acting headteacher. With the help of the MAT currently providing support for the school, you have reshaped the responsibilities and roles of senior leaders. To strengthen further the capacity of the leadership team, three additional senior leaders have also been appointed on a temporary basis. You are in the process of appointing additional staff to support the team that oversees pupils' attendance.

On this first monitoring inspection, we focused primarily on the culture of safeguarding and the provision for pupils' wider development. We also considered leaders' work to improve pupils' behaviour and rates of attendance. Added to this, we reviewed aspects of leaders' curriculum design, support for those pupils who struggle with reading and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

After a delayed start, and following your appointment, senior leaders have accepted the endemic weaknesses that were identified at the previous graded inspection. You are realistic about the magnitude of the task facing you and other leaders. You have prioritised your actions appropriately and you accurately understand the progress that is being made against the areas for improvement.

Since taking up your post, transforming the culture of the school has been your priority. You have worked closely with representatives of the MAT currently providing support to the school, to raise the profile of safeguarding. You have introduced mechanisms for pupils to report bullying and the use of inappropriate language by their peers. When concerns are raised by pupils, you and other leaders deal with these issues swiftly and appropriately. Increasingly, pupils feel that they have a voice and that they will be listened to by staff. However, while some pupils are already sensing a shift in culture, you are realistic about the time that it will take to rebuild the trust between staff and pupils.

Your work to improve standards of pupils' behaviour, while in its early stages, is having a positive effect. For example, the proportion of pupils who come to school and choose not to attend some of their lessons has reduced. Pupils and staff said that behaviour has started to improve in classrooms. Consequently, in some lessons, pupils learn in a calmer environment than in the past. However, you are aware that standards of behaviour are still far from acceptable and that disruption to pupils' learning remains an issue.

Pupils' behaviour during lesson changeovers and at social times is also getting better. Clearer expectations for pupils' behaviour alongside an increased staff presence around the school are helping to ensure that corridors and staircases are more orderly. Pupils have more confidence in staff's ability to deal with poor behaviour during social times. However, while incidents of misbehaviour are reducing, the use of discriminatory language by some pupils continues to be a problem.

It is clear to see that you and other leaders have secured improvements to pupils' rates of attendance. For instance, fewer pupils are regularly absent from school. You and other

leaders have established clear systems and processes to support pupils to attend school more often. You have also ensured that pupils understand the benefits of attending school regularly. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils who are frequently absent from school remains high. You are aware that a lack of staff resource is a key barrier to further improving pupils' rates of attendance. To address this, you are in the process of making additional staff appointments in this area.

You and other leaders recognise the importance of improving the programme that was in place to support pupils' wider development. For example, you have drawn upon a suitable range of external expertise to redesign the 'learning for life' curriculum. This is to ensure that age-appropriate content is delivered to pupils across key stages 3 and 4 in a logical order. The team of carefully selected staff that will deliver this programme have all received appropriate training. Added to this, you have put suitable checks in place to make sure that, going forward, staff are properly equipped and sufficiently confident to deliver this learning well.

With the help of the MAT currently providing support to the school, you and the leadership team are working to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. You have already acted to remedy the weaknesses in the curriculum design that were identified at the previous graded inspection. For instance, pupils, including those attending alternative provision and those with SEND, now learn a suitably broad and ambitious curriculum. Furthermore, in key stage 3, you have ensured that pupils can learn more deeply in subjects, such as languages, history and geography.

Subject leaders have made appropriate amendments to their curriculums to ensure that pupils learn the national curriculum in sufficient depth. Leaders and teachers have carefully considered the knowledge that they want pupils to learn and in what order this content should be delivered. However, much of this work is relatively recent and there is limited evidence currently of the impact on pupils' learning. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, continue to have a variable experience of the curriculum across year groups and subjects.

You are in the process of identifying those pupils with gaps in their reading knowledge. You have also introduced a high-quality programme to support pupils who find reading difficult. You are ensuring that the help that these pupils receive is tailored fully to their individual needs. Added to this, you have appropriate plans in place to upskill staff and leaders in this area. You recognise that the impact of this work will be crucial in ensuring that pupils can learn the curriculum successfully.

Since your appointment, you have embraced the wealth of expertise provided by the MAT currently providing support to the school. This support has been used judiciously to help leaders to accept the school's current position and prioritise their actions appropriately. Resources from this MAT have also been used intelligently to strengthen senior leadership capacity and to provide much needed clarity around leaders' roles and responsibilities.

Credible and suitably knowledgeable members of the IEB have been appointed by the local authority to provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge for leaders. Members of the IEB are already informed well about the school's weaknesses and the progress that you and other leaders are now making. For instance, they are fully aware of the steps that leaders have taken to improve standards of behaviour around the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the IEB, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory  
**His Majesty's Inspector**