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Donald Cumming
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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 that took place on 5 and 6 November 2024, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in December 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, David Roberts, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Paula Crawley (OI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, trust leaders and members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We also discussed this with staff and a representative of the local authority. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also met pupils, carried out lesson visits, observed social times, reviewed samples of pupils' work and reviewed a range of documentation. We have considered all this in coming to our judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to no longer be judged as requiring special measures.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last monitoring visit, the school is in the process of joining a trust. Currently, this trust is acting in a school improvement partner capacity, which includes providing the school with an executive principal, senior leaders, subject directors and support from other trust leads. In addition, a deputy headteacher, a special educational needs coordinator and several new associate senior leaders have been appointed.

The poor published outcomes in 2023 do not reflect the positive changes to the curriculum that the school has implemented. The school has ensured that the curriculum is broad and ambitious and that it clearly sets out the key knowledge that pupils need to learn. As a result, teachers are clear about what they should teach. Classroom routines are consistently well embedded. These have helped to cultivate a positive environment for learning and pupils respond well to them. That said, there is variability in how well the curriculum is delivered. For instance, in some lessons, teachers check carefully whether pupils have understood, and address misconceptions swiftly. However, in other lessons, teachers do not have the expertise to use assessment information to inform next steps. For example, they move on to new learning before some pupils' knowledge is secure. This prevents pupils from developing a deep understanding in some subjects. Consequently, some pupils develop gaps in their learning that are not addressed.

There are now stronger systems in place to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Work has begun on improving the information that is given to staff about pupils with SEND. Leaders accept that some staff need support to adapt and break down learning effectively. At the end of key stage 4, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should. There is still a significant number of pupils with SEND in the school with unmet needs. The school recognises how this impacts on other areas of their school life and can lead to poor behaviour and low attendance.

More priority has been given to reading, albeit only at key stage 3. Pupils in key stage 3 are routinely assessed in reading and the school accurately identifies where pupils have gaps in their reading knowledge. The school does not routinely assess pupils' reading at key stage 4. Some pupils have received support in reading, and this has helped them to develop into more confident and fluent readers. However, this support is not given to all pupils who need it. As a result, some pupils' progress through the curriculum is hampered because of their reading struggles. The school has developed its approach to reading for 'leisure and pleasure'. At the moment, this is centred around key stage 3, although there are some plans to extend this to key stage 4.

Pupils and staff feel safe in the school. The school has successfully dealt with pupils' use of discriminatory language. Most pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school at social times has vastly improved. Classrooms are calm and purposeful. In most cases, pupils act respectfully towards staff. Nevertheless, there remain a significant minority of pupils who do not adhere to the school's rules or expectations of behaviour. The number of suspensions has risen drastically. Thus far, the school's efforts to manage the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils have not been effective. The frequent use of repeat

suspensions is not helping to turn around their behaviour. Instead, these pupils are missing out on vital curriculum time when they are excluded from school. Some parents and carers are also concerned about the school's use of suspensions.

The school's work to shift the culture in the school has borne fruit. Pupils' consideration for others has improved. The 'praise culture' allows pupils' achievements to be celebrated. For example, many pupils are eager to show their work at 'Proud Tuesday'. Pupils spoke empathetically about the culture day that was organised to celebrate pupils' different heritages.

The school quite rightly identifies attendance as one of its biggest challenges. Increased capacity and clear processes have helped to improve the school's understanding of pupil absence. There has been a small improvement in pupils' attendance rates. Furthermore, the strategies implemented to improve punctuality have borne some fruit. Pupils' punctuality is improving. Even so, absence rates remain high, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. This is further exacerbated by the high number of suspensions. Too many pupils are not attending school frequently. Consequently, some pupils' academic progress is severely hampered.

Members of the IEB have an accurate understanding of the school's weaknesses and the progress that the school is making. They have ensured that the school has prioritised the right actions. Furthermore, they use their expertise to hold leaders to account. For instance, they have challenged the school around the high number of suspensions and the low attendance rates.

Leaders acknowledge that much of the change that has happened in the school has been accelerated by the external support that the trust, which the school is due to join, has given. It has provided the school with processes, policies and a well-thought-out curriculum. In addition, the school is heavily supported by personnel from the trust who are based on site. This has strengthened leadership capacity. Staff, parents and pupils recognise the positive changes that have come about and attribute them to the support given by the trust. Most staff are supportive of the changes that the school has made. They feel more supported than they have in the past.

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

Jenny Jones
His Majesty's Inspector