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Dr D Kershaw
The Executive Principal
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Dear Dr Kershaw

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Fullhurst Community College

Following my visit with Anne Pitt HMI, Raye Allison-Smith and William Goodall to your college on 29 and 30 April 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures in December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Leicester City.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Fullhurst Community College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 April 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the two headteachers, members of the senior leadership, including those seconded from the local authority, groups of students, the chair of the interim executive board, and representatives from the local authority and a national leader of education.

Context

Fullhurst Community College was inspected in December 2008 and was judged to require special measures. This categorisation followed the designation of a notice to improve in November 2007. To address this, the local authority appointed the already deployed associate principal to the post of executive principal in May 2008, a move that was accompanied by the establishment of an interim executive board in June 2008. This body has replaced the previous governing body; it is made up from appointed members, most of whom hold senior positions in local organisations, for example the local council and local authority. The substantive principal left at the end of the autumn term 2008 and the executive principal left at the end of the spring term 2009. They have been replaced from the beginning of the summer term by an executive principal and principal until 2010 in the first instance. The heads of faculty in English and mathematics left the college at the end of the spring term. There are serious staffing issues within these departments. The college is part of the government's National Challenge programme. The college is due to move into new buildings in the autumn term 2009.

Achievement and standards

Achievement at both key stages is inadequate and standards remain very low. This is a direct result of a number of factors, including frequent changes in staff, the inconsistency in the quality of teaching, some students' poor attitudes to learning and low levels of attendance. Consequently, students' progress, as observed in lessons, is too variable and inadequate overall. Furthermore, inspection evidence indicates that students' achievement is not improving fast enough and too many students are not on course to meet their targets. This is because teaching is not ensuring that previous underachievement is being compensated for fully.

Present predictions for the Year 9 students indicate that they are likely to attain standards that are well below those expected nationally in mathematics and information and communication technology. While, in English and science, standards are likely to remain below the national average.

There is, as yet, a lack of clear evidence to support these predictions, but even if they are accurate, the college will miss the statutory agreed targets for progress to

Level 5+ in English and mathematics by 10 percentage points and the Fischer Family Trust band D target by seven points.

The college's predictions for current Key Stage 4 students are that standards overall likely to remain very low, with 22% of students likely to gain the equivalent of at least five GCSEs A* to C, including English and mathematics. This is well below the floor target and the statutory agreed target of 32%, but closer to the Fischer Family Trust D target of 26%. English has maintained the proportion of students gaining A* to C at 35%. There is an indication of improvement in standards in science, but in mathematics they are still too low at the end of both key stages, and the number of students making two levels progress over Key Stage 4 has collapsed to only 7%. Standards in lessons observed mirror this.

Although the tracking of students' progress has been started, it is mainly in Year 11 at the moment. The college has not yet analysed the data it gathers to identify underperforming groups of students. The relative underachievement of boys has been noted but beyond that there has been little progress. This means that there is no secure evidence that groups such as ethnic minorities, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those students who speak English as an additional language, or other groups, are progressing satisfactorily through the college.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and accelerate students' progress, especially that of boys, and particularly in mathematics and science – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance rates have declined since the college's previous inspection and are inadequate. Behaviour seen during the monitoring inspection was satisfactory. Most students were polite, cheerful and welcoming to visitors. Senior leaders recognise however that when students are between lessons, walking around the college during breaks and at lunchtime, their behaviour is sometimes a little overexcited. Inspection evidence shows that, at the change of lessons and after lunchtime, punctuality to lessons was poor. Staff worked hard to hurry students into lessons but there was nevertheless a steady flow of students arriving late for the start of lessons.

The number of exclusions has dropped this term because the college has introduced a programme of education off site for the most disaffected students where they carry out programmes more suited to their needs. The creation of the unit has ensured that students' whereabouts are known and has allowed these students to complete their examination and vocational courses.

Quality of provision

The college's target of 100% of teaching to be satisfactory, with 70% good or better lessons, has not been reached and there is still too much teaching that is inadequate.

Fewer than half of the lessons seen during the monitoring inspection were satisfactory or better. This is significantly lower than the college's historical analysis.

The current overall picture is one of marked inconsistency between classes, year groups and subject areas in the quality of lesson planning, assessment, the marking of students' work and the quality of classroom practice. However, it is important to note, in most lessons observed, behaviour was not the main reason for unsatisfactory teaching and learning. Moreover, where teachers effectively motivated students and work was interesting and structured carefully so that they could succeed, students behaved well. The vast majority of students are not hard to encourage and they respond very positively to appropriate praise. Where teachers failed to engage students or lacked positive behaviour management skills then lessons had a strong undercurrent of low-level disruption, which slowed learning.

The quality of marking is inadequate because it is too variable across classes, year groups and subjects. Occasionally marking is good. Here teachers provide effective feedback that enables students to understand how they can improve their work and move to the next level or grade boundary. Most marking seen was cursory and often did not correct inaccuracies in students' work, nor help them understand what level or grade they were working at.

Too often, the curriculum does not meet the needs of students, with teachers failing to plan effective lessons for the range of learners because very limited use is made of assessment information. Consequently, activities and tasks are not matched suitably to the students' abilities. In the weakest lessons, teachers' plans describe activities as opposed to planning what students should learn next, based on their prior learning, in order to make better progress. Too many lessons consist of a perfunctory introduction to the whole class followed by the completion of work sheets that are insufficiently challenging. This results in missed opportunities to allow students to make choices or show initiative. The college recognises that the proportion of satisfactory or better teaching is not yet high enough to raise educational standards at the pace required after a period of sustained underachievement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality and consistency of teaching by: quickly eradicating inadequate teaching and tackling weaknesses in teaching so that students are consistently challenged; making better use of assessment information to ensure that work is matched to students' capabilities; improving the quality of academic guidance given to students – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The new executive and substantive principals have had a positive impact on leadership and management since taking up the post in April 2009. Taking decisive and swift action to address and arrest a deterioration of students' behaviour, they have

succeeded in creating a mostly calm learning environment. Furthermore, they have the confidence of the staff and know their strengths and areas for development.

One of the most important qualities of their leadership has been the ability to develop the effectiveness of the senior leadership by insisting on core values and creating a sense of individual worth, responsibility and accountability within a good team ethos. This in turn has led to a slowly emerging understanding throughout the staff of their collective responsibilities. Staff are beginning to realise that there has been a legacy of underachievement. Most are now committed to developing their own practice and to seeing the college succeed.

Since their appointment, the principals have been highly analytical, swiftly and accurately assessing the true extent of the college's weaknesses. The college's raising attainment plan was written before the arrival of the new leadership. Both principals rightly recognise that this plan needs to be revised to include crisp, measurable outcomes for students as indicators of the success of the planned actions. Moreover, they accept that links between the actions taken to promote improvement have not been clearly articulated and hence are not well understood by staff at different levels throughout the college. Senior leaders accept that the college's monitoring is not robust and evaluation is not sharp enough to provide an accurate picture of the impact of its work.

Not all senior and middle leaders, including heads of house, departments and subjects, demonstrate the high levels of leadership or classroom skills necessary to model or evaluate good practice as leaders of learning. As a result, the regular meetings between the senior leadership team and middle leaders lack rigour, impeding the extent to which middle leaders are held to account over raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance in their area of responsibility. The skills of many middle leaders remain underdeveloped so these leaders are currently having a limited impact on ensuring the college's improvement. The principals have taken steps in the very short time since their appointment to clarify and strengthen the roles and responsibilities for colleagues in senior leadership positions. However, these measures are too new to have had any discernible impact at the time of the monitoring visit.

Students' progress and their attainment are beginning to be tracked more carefully than in the past, which is enabling all teachers to see more clearly the levels students are working at now, and the levels they are expected to attain by the end of the year. This is a very recent development and the information is not yet used effectively enough when planning lessons to ensure that students' work builds on what the students already know and can do.

The college has a formal support programme designed to improve weak teaching. Leaders recognise the need to offer more extensive support and coaching in order to rapidly eradicate weaknesses. A number of staff are currently being trained to take on a more active role in this.

Minutes of the strategy and task group meetings from the autumn and spring terms show little focus on the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted, as energies were focused on the new building and staffing issues. The interim executive board is taking its role very seriously. Meetings to date have been appropriately focused on improvement. The chair has a good grasp of the need for urgent improvement as well as the need to build a sustainable effective college and to ensure that aspirations are high for all students.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve leadership and management by: urgently confirming the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders improving the coordination and evaluation of activities so standards rise, teaching improves and key initiatives are fully embedded ensuring middle leaders are appropriately involved in the decision-making process and are held to account for the standards achieved and quality of provision in their area of responsibilities – inadequate.

External support

The college is appreciative of the support offered by Leicester City and other external partners but has not always been best placed to make the best use of the support offered. Plans have been reviewed and some aspects of the wide-ranging additional support have been re-brokered. However, this has slowed progress overall. The interim executive board and the director of Children's Services have taken decisive action to tackle leadership difficulties within the college with new working relationships recently established.

When it was submitted to Ofsted, the local authority's statement of action was found to need revisions. These have been made and it now meets requirements. Nevertheless, along with the college's own improvement plan, the statement of action would benefit from more measures of student outcomes to determine its successes.

The local authority's target date of the spring term 2010 for the removal of special measures is reasonable although, given the slow start to the improvement process, the college's progress will need to accelerate considerably if this target is to be met.

Priorities for further improvement

- The college should continue to focus on the areas for improvement identified in its previous inspection.