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Mr Nigel Pattinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pattinson

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college on 1 December 2009, and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your senior colleagues, the students, the governors and the local authority officers for the time they gave to our discussions.

The college has seen significant change since the inspection. In addition to your appointment from 1 September as headteacher, a new assistant headteacher has been appointed and the senior leadership team has been restructured. Eleven new teachers also joined the staff in September, including some on a temporary basis.

As a result of the inspection on 1 and 2 April 2009, the college was asked to tackle underachievement and ensure a greater match between the curriculum and the needs of a significant proportion of students in Key Stage 4. In addition, it was asked to share aspects of good management more widely across the college and to improve the consistency and quality of the marking of students' work.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The attainment of students in the latest examination results at GCSE showed a slight improvement as did the progress and achievement of students as measured by the contextual valued added measure. However, standards remain too low, the college did not meet its targets and achievement remained below average. Progress in lessons that were observed was satisfactory, but was not rapid enough for lower



ability students to make up quickly for the slower rate of progress in previous years. The college's analysis of progress for the current Year 11 shows that the proportion of pupils on track to attain five or more GCSE grades at A* to C will increase significantly and there will also be an increase in the proportion gaining this measure when the subjects of English and mathematics are included. Systems are now being established to collect robust attainment data for pupils in each year group, but this data will not be available until later in the term. The rigorous analysis of this data to identify underachieving pupils remains an urgent task. There is an effective process of intervention planned for those students identified as underachieving.

The college has taken action to broaden the curriculum so that it meets the needs of students, particularly those of lower academic ability and those at risk of disengagement from learning. A BTEC science course has been provided for a larger number of students and is meeting their needs well. The number of vocational courses leading to accreditation has been increased. An alternative curriculum for a small group of students has been widened to include access to a greater range of qualifications including BTEC work skills. Given the constraints on changing the curriculum at short notice, the college has made satisfactory progress in addressing this area and there are clear plans for further improvement.

Roles and responsibilities in the senior leadership team have been clarified. There is a clear line management system that holds middle leaders to account and their effectiveness is improving. They carry out regular monitoring of provision and outcomes. Training has been provided to develop their expertise for this work and judgements are moderated by senior leaders. There is room to increase the rigour and incisiveness of evaluations; in particular, there needs to be a greater focus on students' learning during lesson observations.

Progress has been made on improving the quality of marking. There are examples of very good marking that provide clear advice to students on how to improve. The majority of students are aware of their targets and are given guidance on how to reach them. However, a small proportion of marking is not yet of a sufficiently high quality and addressing this remains a key priority.

The college has specialist status for business and enterprise which has supported the development of enterprise activities for many students. Involvement in the local enterprise learning partnership is strengthening activities and partnerships, particularly with primary schools. The college is aware that attainment in the specialist subjects must improve as the targets were not met in 2009. The new headteacher has created a new post in the senior leadership team to improve the impact of specialist status.

There is an effective local authority action plan. The planned activities draw on the expertise of the school improvement service, national strategy consultants and partner schools to provide guidance and training. The impact of the plan is evaluated rigorously and there is evidence of improvement.



I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Garry Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

