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Mr Stephen Wall
Headteacher
Sutherland Business and Enterprise College
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Dear Mr Wall

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Tuesday 18 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors, and to the staff and students with whom we spoke.

As a result of the inspection on 30 September and 1 October 2009, the college was asked to improve teaching and learning and raise students' achievement by eradicating inadequate teaching and involving students more actively in their learning; and to develop and implement an agreed code of conduct to improve students' behaviour, particularly in lessons.

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 students' achievement.

Validated data for 2009 indicates that the standards attained by last year's Year 11 students were higher than in previous years. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C rose to slightly above the national average, although the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics remained below average. The college has built well on this improved picture. The vast majority of students in the current Year 11 have already taken and passed a range of formal examinations and the college's collation of these results indicate higher attainment than in 2009. Almost half the students have already attained five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, which is in line with the 2009 national average. Students with special educational needs have exceeded the college's targets for this group of learners. The college has rightly identified that too few students gain A and A* grades at GCSE and, sensibly, this is its next focus.



The college is using its specialist status appropriately to expand the curriculum and raise standards. The headteacher's vision for how Co-operative Trust status will improve the college is also starting to effect change.

The college's practice of entering students early for formal examinations is proving to be very motivating for the older students. By giving them a taste of success, it is helping to keep them focused on their learning during Years 10 and 11. Gradually, this is starting to have an impact on behaviour in these year groups. For example, during the inspection, a lower set in Year 10 was observed working in a highly focused way towards their BTEC art qualification. However, attendance is low in Year 10 and this year group is still receiving the highest number of fixed-term exclusions, so work remains to be done in ensuring that these students achieve well at the end of the key stage.

Because teaching has improved, students are starting to make better progress throughout the college. The college has worked effectively with staff whose teaching was not consistently at least satisfactory. Both the college's evidence and inspection evidence show that these staff have made significant progress in improving their teaching and students' learning. During the inspection, teaching and learning were satisfactory with some good elements in three of the lessons observed, and good in two. Importantly, the college has simultaneously developed strategies which they want all staff to use to improve students' learning. A strong focus on 'co-operative learning' has extended the range of opportunities students have to work in groups and pairs, and to think, reason and discuss. During the inspection, when given the opportunity to use these strategies, students generally responded well. For example, during a food technology lesson they worked co-operatively and at a good pace to make shortbread; in an English lesson, they read in groups and expressed their views clearly. Occasionally, while students complied with the expectations to participate actively, they did so reluctantly.

The college has introduced a suitably structured new system for managing behaviour, with a greater emphasis both on rewards and consequences. Students spoken with during the inspection commented that the college is now 'much stricter'. While they had not necessarily welcomed this at first, they now generally viewed it positively. However, almost all students thought that there was a lack of consistency in the application of the system, particularly with regard to consequences. This corresponds with evidence from the inspection. Students' behaviour during the inspection was generally satisfactory, both in lessons and around the school. In the best lessons, it was good. Most teachers used the agreed behaviour management strategies, such as 'one voice', to remind students of the expectations, to which the students responded well. However, occasionally the strategies were not used to manage low level disruption.

The number of fixed-term exclusions rose considerably during the second half of the autumn term as the college implemented the new system and aimed to convey clear



messages about raised expectations. Governors rightly questioned these high exclusions figures. During the spring term, exclusions reduced by three quarters and have stayed reasonably low during the summer term until just before this inspection, when a number of students were excluded. Behaviour managers have provided a useful support structure during an unsettled time. However, now that the college has made progress, the senior leaders recognise that the next step is to refine their strategies for managing students' behaviour and maximising their achievement by increasing the consistency of positive behaviour management in the classroom and minimising reliance on the removal of students from lessons and on internal and fixed-term exclusion.

The local authority's statement of action has been revised and is now satisfactory. Support from consultants and National Challenge advisers was slow to begin but is now satisfactory and, in some areas, has been well focused and effective.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

