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Mr Daryll Chapman
The Acting Principal
Tavistock College
Crowndale Road
Tavistock
Devon
PL19 8DD

Dear Mr Chapman

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Tavistock College

Following my visit with three additional inspectors to your school on 23 and 24 June 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the following qualifications:

- appointments are only made to the school's most effective departments, where strong support for professional development can be assured
- the local authority supports the appointment
- the HMI leading the monitoring inspections supports the appointment.

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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Tavistock College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 June 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, including 33 lessons, an assembly and two tutor periods, scrutinised documents, met with the acting principal and acting vice principal, a range of staff, groups of students, the chair of governors, representatives from external agencies, a representative from the local authority, and the college's improvement partner.

Context

The principal at the time of the last inspection has left the college. The college has been led since February 2010 by an experienced principal and vice principal who have been seconded from Okehampton College. The governing body has also undergone significant change. Eight governors have left the college since the last inspection, either because they reached the end of their term of office or they resigned. These governors have been replaced. No teaching staff have left or joined the college.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Students' progress in lessons has improved since the last inspection. Most students work effectively when provided with tasks and activities that interest them and actively involve them in their learning. However, if tasks are not engaging some students quickly become distracted and this negatively impacts on the progress they make. The college now assesses students' progress more frequently, particularly in Years 10 and 11. This data and inspection evidence indicate that students' progress over time is improving. Predicted grades for current Year 11 students indicate that attainment is likely to rise this summer, but the challenging targets in the college's improvement plan are not likely to be achieved. There was significant variation in the achievement of Year 11 students in different subjects in 2009. This level of variation has been reduced although still remains high.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students spoken to were positive about improvements in behaviour since the previous inspection. Around the college there is a generally calm and purposeful atmosphere and there has been a significant fall in fixed term exclusions. Students reported that they feel safe and that incidents of bullying are rare. When they do occur staff take quick and effective action. Staff are applying the college's behaviour strategy with an increasing level of consistency and success, although variations in practice were observed. As a result, low level disruptive behaviour is occasionally allowed to disturb the learning of students. Attendance has steadily improved but

remains close to the national average. The percentage of students who have particularly low levels of attendance has remained at a similar level to that seen at the last inspection. The college monitors attendance well and has a range of intervention strategies in place. However, systems for celebrating good attendance are insufficiently developed.

The effectiveness of provision

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have effectively reviewed the quality of teaching through frequent monitoring of lessons. They have revised the focus of lesson observations so that it has a sharper emphasis on students' learning. Joint observations undertaken during this inspection confirmed the accuracy of senior leaders' judgements of the quality of teaching. Staff have been supported through a broad range of professional development activities that are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching, which is steadily improving. However, it remains inconsistent in quality across the college. There is both good and outstanding teaching, but too much which remains satisfactory, and a very small percentage which is inadequate. Teachers are beginning to challenge students to take greater responsibility for their own learning through the use of activities and groupings that require more independent work. The success of this is variable as not all students have yet taken on board their responsibility in the learning process. Where teaching has the greatest impact on learning, the planned work meets the needs of all students well and quickly engages their interest. Students understand what they are required to do and lessons proceed at a good pace. In these lessons teachers make effective use of questioning to check, explore and develop students' understanding. In the less successful lessons teachers do not make effective use of assessment data to plan activities that meet the needs of all students in the class. Teachers often talk for too long, do too much work for students and do not provide activities that engage and interest them.

Students are aware of their target grades or levels and how well they are doing in relation to these targets. However, written feedback to students about how to improve their work is of variable quality. As a result, students are less clear about what actions they need to take to improve their work. In the best practice students are provided with regular, clear and specific written feedback on their work that indicates one or two key points they can work on to improve in their next tasks.

Senior leaders have been successful in broadening the curriculum, so that a more suitable range of Year 10 and Year 11 courses is available to meet the needs of all students. A range of vocational courses, including Business and Technology Education Council qualifications (BTECs) and diplomas, are being introduced from September 2010. Students have been given helpful advice and guidance regarding these courses and interest in them is high. The curriculum offer for those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also being developed well through the planned introduction of nurture groups and qualifications that better

meet their needs. The senior leadership team is also sensibly looking at the structure of the school day and timetable in order to bring better coherence to the school day and to provide more opportunities for setting in some subject areas.

Senior leaders have undertaken a thorough and rigorous review of the provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those identified as having weak literacy skills. Although areas of high quality support and practice were rightly identified, such as the support for statemented students, there are weaknesses in the provision for students at school action or school action plus. For example, procedures to track the progress of these students and the consistency and effectiveness of the support provided in lessons by teaching assistants needs to be improved. A detailed action plan is now in place to address these and other issues. An acting special educational needs coordinator has recently started to effectively implement this plan with local authority support. Those students identified as gifted and talented have been placed on a central register and teaching staff have been provided with this information. However, although teachers are aware of the gifted and talented students in their lessons, they do not always provide them with suitably challenging work. The curriculum is being reviewed and developed to better meet the needs of these students with, for example, the introduction of AS critical thinking in Key Stage 4 and some students starting GCSE languages in Key Stage 3.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise achievement by improving provision – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting principal and vice principal are providing the college with clear and effective strategic leadership. They have taken successful action to empower staff and involve them in decision making through extending the senior leadership team and establishing a policy group that enables staff to be involved in strategic planning. These actions have had a significant impact on raising staff morale. The challenge for the new acting principal, starting in September 2010, is to build on the progress made in this area. Middle leaders are committed to improving outcomes for students, but they vary in their effectiveness in monitoring provision and outcomes and driving improvement. However, it is a measure of their commitment to the improvement process that 33 are currently enrolled on a middle leadership course. Senior leaders have introduced a good centralised system to track the progress of students towards their challenging targets in all subjects. Frequent assessment points, particularly in Years 10 and 11, now enable senior leaders and heads of department to identify underachievement at an early stage and intervene. For example, a range of subject-based interventions, such as revision and booster sessions, are now in place. Individual mentoring has also been introduced to support those students who need support and guidance across a range of subjects. These actions are beginning to have a positive impact on raising achievement. However,

procedures to monitor the impact of specific interventions on students' achievement are at an early stage of development.

The governing body demonstrates a strong commitment to improvement. The implementation and impact of the college improvement plan is being monitored well through the action plan monitoring committee. Governors are working effectively in partnership with the local authority to drive improvement in the school and secure long term stability in senior leadership and management. Governors have undertaken an audit of existing policies to ensure that they are up to date and recorded. All statutory policies relating to equalities are now in place. Documentation and arrangements to monitor policies have also now been established. However, procedures to monitor the implementation and impact of the policies are at an early stage of development.

Senior leaders have undertaken a thorough audit of the college's religious, ethnic and socio-economic context and the contribution made by each curriculum area to promoting community cohesion. As a result, a detailed and comprehensive action plan has been established to further promote community cohesion. The staff's commitment to this area for development is clearly evident in the large number who are voluntarily involved in the working groups looking at how to further promote community cohesion at local, national and international levels.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- ensure the leadership and management of the college develop the capacity to improve achievement – good
- ensure statutory requirements related to equalities are met – satisfactory
- ensure a more effective contribution to promoting community cohesion – good.

External support

The local authority's statement of action addresses the issues raised by the previous inspection well and it is closely linked to the college's improvement plan. There are good, positive relationships between the college and local authority and they are working together well to improve provision and outcomes in the college. The local authority has provided a good range of support for leadership and management, teaching and learning and community cohesion. Effective individual subject support has also been provided for a range of departments. The college's improvement partner has provided senior leaders with good support and challenge and has coordinated support for the college well.