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6 March 2015

Ms G Comber
The Principal
The West Somerset Community College
Bircham Road
Alcombe
Minehead, TA24 6AY

Dear Ms Comber

Special measures monitoring inspection of The West Somerset Community College

Following my visit with Gill Carter and Iain Freeland, Additional Inspectors, to your college on 3 and 4 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the college's previous monitoring inspection in December 2014.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The college is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the college does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Somerset, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2014

- Quickly eradicate all inadequate teaching and increase the amount of good teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise their expectations of what students are able to achieve
 - use information on students' achievement and individual needs to plan learning activities that enable them to make good progress
 - provide students with consistently high-quality feedback and marking that informs them of how well they have done and the next steps they need to take to improve their learning
 - make sure that students act upon feedback and marking so that they can demonstrate that they know how to improve their learning
 - work alongside the most effective teachers in the school to learn from their practice.
- Raise achievement across the college, particularly in English, mathematics and the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - the most able students are suitably challenged
 - students' individual needs are well known, particularly those who may be disabled, have special educational needs or are eligible for pupil premium funding, to provide them with highly effective support
 - the transition process from Year 8 into Year 9 is strengthened, particularly around understanding students' levels of achievement, so that they are able to commence learning immediately and not waste valuable learning time
 - extra support sessions are rigorously monitored to make sure that students are making faster progress than they would without the extra support
 - high-quality GCSE English and mathematics teaching is provided in the sixth form so that those who do not have a good grade in these subjects are able to achieve one.
- Eradicate the poor behaviour which impedes students' learning.
- Raise students' attendance levels to be at least in line with the national average.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - training senior and middle leaders to monitor and evaluate robustly the impact of initiatives that they have implemented
 - ensuring that teachers understand and make good use of information on students' individual educational, social and emotional needs
 - specifying how and when leaders will check the progress made towards meeting important targets
 - fully implementing the statutory sixth form study programmes
 - ensuring that governors hold leaders to account for the performance of the college.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the college's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the Principal, senior and middle leaders; the Chair and another member of the Governing Body; many teaching and non-teaching staff individually and in small and large groups; and with groups of students in formal meetings, around the college and in the sixth form common room. All of the senior leaders attended the inspection team's meetings where inspectors reviewed their evidence.

The inspectors observed lessons in English, mathematics and science with teachers with responsibility for these subjects and provided feedback to subject leaders and/or teams. A review of teaching in the sixth form was undertaken with the new senior leader with responsibility for the sixth form and the new strategic leader for the sixth form. Lessons were observed with senior staff in a range of other subjects. In these lessons, inspectors looked at students' work and talked to the students about the work and their current progress.

The lead inspectors also took account of the 231 responses to the on-line survey, Parent View, and letters and e-mails from, and telephone conversations with, more than 10 parents.

Context

A new senior leader with responsibility for the sixth form took up post very recently. A new strategic leader for the sixth form has also been appointed.

There have been changes to the organisation of subjects. Science is now a stand-alone department to bring it in line with English and mathematics. There is a subject leader for science and a raising standards leader for science has also been appointed, but is not yet in post. This has led to some reorganisation of the other three faculties, each of which contains a range of subjects.

The college continues to be disrupted by high levels of short- and long-term staff illness and many lessons are covered by supply staff, often not specialists in the subject area. In the sixth form, when staff are absent, the lessons are not covered. The college employs a significant number of unqualified teachers; around one in six teachers is unqualified. These are appropriately trained and experienced specialist staff teaching courses leading to vocational qualifications.

The college is in the early stages of becoming a sponsored academy as part of a multi-academy trust.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Principal and senior leaders do not have the capacity to improve the college rapidly enough. No significant improvements have been secured since the inspection in October 2014. Insufficient progress has been made on the recommendations arising from the first monitoring inspection in December 2014. The college lacks the clear leadership needed to make the rapid changes required.

Teaching has not improved since the inspection in October and students' achievement has not improved quickly enough. The current management structures have insufficient focus on improving the quality of subject teaching and lack clear lines of accountability. English and mathematics, and now science, stand outside of the faculty structure. In these subjects, there is some clarity about who is responsible for improving teaching and raising students' achievement. However, science teachers are still unsure about the changed arrangements in science. In these subjects, there are some early signs that actions are being identified and implemented to bring about improvement. Other subjects are grouped into faculties that lack clear lines of accountability. Consequently, teachers are unsure about how to improve their teaching.

The subject reviews undertaken by school leaders since the visit in December present an over-generous view of the current performance of the school. They lack the necessary precision to identify clearly what needs to improve. The review process has been far too slow. Since the last visit in December, one cycle of reviews is almost complete, but no significant actions have yet been taken to improve the overall quality of teaching in each subject. Some individual teachers who require more support and guidance have been identified.

The very large majority of staff in the school are demotivated and morale is very low, which further detracts from the quality of teaching in the college. Teaching and non-teaching staff have lost confidence in senior leaders' ability to manage the basic routines of the school well, such as providing a reliable calendar for the college year and a teaching timetable that meets students' needs well. Senior leaders have demoralised staff by the frequent and constant changes made. Communications between senior leaders and both teaching and non-teaching staff are not effective.

Many students report that at least one lesson of the five each day will be taken by a cover teacher. This is supported by an analysis of the college's staff absence and cover data. These data show that for lower ability classes two or three lessons each day are often taught by cover teachers. There have been far too many changes of classes. Some Year 9 students are now with their third mathematics teacher; some Year 10 students are in their fourth English class since the start of the college year. Of the 231 parents who responded to the on-line survey, Parent View, at the time of the inspection in October and since, three quarters say that they would not recommend the college.

Governors still rely too much on what they are told by the Principal and college leaders. They still lack sufficient independent analysis to identify accurately the college's performance and what needs to be done. Consequently, this recommendation in the review of governance is still to be fully implemented.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The rate of improvement in students' achievement is far too slow. The college's senior leaders have a significantly over-generous view of the performance of the college. Their view of the current achievement of students in all year groups is far too high and not supported by the quality of students' work in English, mathematics, science and a range of other subjects, and for all groups of students. The college, at all levels, is over reliant on assessment information from formal tests. Insufficient account is taken of students' on-going progress and achievement.

Expectations of what the most able students can achieve are too low. As a result, many do not make the progress that they should. The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students is not closing. The recommendations in the review of pupil premium funding have not been implemented quickly enough. The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is not good enough and not improving fast enough. The provision for these students is poor and there is a lack of effective strategic senior leadership for this aspect of the college's work.

Students' work shows far too many gaps in their progress through missing or incomplete work and/or where too many lessons have been taken by non-specialist cover teachers. Many students do not know how much progress they are making or what is expected of them. Students' skills in reading and writing are not developed well enough. In addition, leaders have not yet tackled the significant underachievement in the sixth form.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Many students are demotivated, have low expectations of what they could achieve and have poor attitudes to their work. In all of the lessons visited, some students in the class showed very little interest in their work and this was not tackled by the teacher. While students mostly complied with what the teacher asked them to do, they did so with very little enthusiasm and were happy to work at a slow pace. Often, work is incomplete and/or whole sections are missing. However, the very large majority of students want to do better. They are frustrated by not knowing how well they are doing, by the low expectations placed on them, by frequent disruptions to their progress through being taught by cover teachers and constant changes of teachers and classes.

Behaviour around the college is generally good and students are safe. However, students report incidents of poor behaviour around the school and in some lessons, which inspectors also saw. Students feel strongly that these are often not dealt with

well. Senior leaders lack presence around the school during lessons to deal with disruption and poor behaviour.

Students' attendance continues to be too low. However, some actions have been taken. The work done with Year 10 students is beginning to show some impact, as these students' attendance is improving and persistent absence is declining.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has not improved significantly since the inspection in October. The college's subject reviews give a much more positive view of the quality of teaching than that from inspectors' evaluation of teaching over time and the quality of students' work. This means that senior leaders have not taken the actions required to make the improvements needed.

The large majority of teachers do not monitor students' progress during lessons. They rely too much on marking students' work, which only happens every two or three weeks. The quality of this marking is poor. Whilst almost all teachers mark using the college's agreed procedures, they do not make clear to students what they need to do to improve their work. As a consequence, students do not respond to the marking. Senior leaders then see this as something to be addressed with students, not teachers. Teachers are meant to mark for 'literacy' – they do not. Other than the occasional spelling correction, teachers' marking does not provide guidance to students to improve their writing. Students are rarely given any extended writing to complete, which is an area in which senior leaders mistakenly believe the college has made progress.

Even when teachers do have information on students' progress, they do not use this well in their planning and teaching. Teaching is rarely matched to the current progress of individual and groups of students in the topic they are learning about. Where this information is used, it is based on the six-weekly formal assessment points, rather than the students' current progress.

Sixth form

No improvements have been made in the sixth form since the inspection in October or on the points arising from the visit in December. Leaders and governors have not undertaken a thorough review of the sixth form. Consequently, school leaders are unable to explain why, in so many subjects, students with similar starting points achieve very different outcomes.

Students' attendance in the sixth form, at around 70%, is appalling. The current system, where students only attend when they have lessons and registration is only undertaken in lessons, is not working. Retention on many courses is not good enough. Too many students are on the wrong courses as a result of poor guidance before they join the sixth form.

Expectations of students are far too low; students agree with inspectors that this is the case. The targets they are set are far too low, given their prior achievement. However, many students interviewed during this visit are very concerned that they will not meet even these low expectations. They report far too many disruptions and factors that restrict their progress: lack of specialist teachers; cancelled lessons; little or poor feedback on their work and progress; lack of guidance and support; and not being given the study skills to make best use of independent study time.

Students' progress is not tracked frequently or well enough. This contributes to low expectations, inadequate target setting and poor quality feedback. When classes are taught by two or three teachers in the subject, these teachers often do not review progress and plan together.

In lessons, the best use is not made of teaching time, for example using lessons to undertake administrative tasks linked to coursework rather than learning. Teaching does not focus on the progress of individual students, even when data show that those with similar starting points are making very different amounts of progress. Students often do not make best use of independent study time to prepare for lessons and complete set work.

The new senior leader with overall responsibility for the sixth form had been in post for just over a week at the time of this visit. He is supported by an existing teacher, with expertise in the sixth form, who has taken on the role of strategic lead. Together, they already have plans for significant changes to the sixth form. These plans are sensible, although clearly there has been no time to implement them.

External support

As a converter academy, the college receives no direct support from the local authority. However, it has been included in one of the Somerset Challenge clusters. This has led to links with other schools, but currently no direct impact on improving the college.

The college has made informal arrangements with several other schools, for example, to help with the subject reviews and to provide external moderation of assessments. It is pursuing links to obtain help with raising students' attendance.

Recently, the Regional Schools Commissioner has set in place arrangements for the college to become a sponsored academy and part of a multi-academy trust. These discussions are at an early stage.

What the college needs to do to improve

The governing body should, with the utmost urgency:

- eradicate the weaknesses in the leadership of the college
- ensure school leaders make much more rapid progress on the areas for improvement set out at the inspection in October 2014.