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Liam McDaid
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Dear Mr McDaid

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bolton UTC

Following my visit to your college on 19 and 20 October 2017, 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 that have been taken since the college's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The college's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the college may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bolton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017.

- Undertake a review of governance.
- Improve the capacity of the governing body to:
 - fully embrace the culture of a UTC
 - accurately evaluate the performance of the college through objective analysis
 - hold leaders, including the chief executive officer (CEO), rigorously to account for the quality of education provided by the college
 - show integrity in the recruitment of new pupils.
- Ensure that college leaders and managers are given time throughout the week to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make by:
 - improving the accuracy with which teachers evaluate the achievement of their pupils
 - ensuring that teachers use their understanding of what their pupils already understand and can do to plan learning activities that better meet pupils' needs
 - ensuring that leaders give support to those teachers whose work is not good enough
 - ensuring that, as a priority, teachers who are timetabled to teach a class do so without being redirected to other activities.
- Ensure that pupils start courses that are appropriate based on their prior attainment as well as their career aspirations.
- Improve the effectiveness of safeguarding by ensuring that procedures include:
 - a full and accurate record of what has been done to ensure the safeguarding of individuals
 - a full and accurate description of what needs to be done, by whom and by when to ensure the safeguarding of individuals
 - regular and frequent reviews of each pupil's case to ensure that all staff and external agencies are doing what is expected of them.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 19 October 2017 to 20 October 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal, other senior leaders, middle leaders, groups of pupils, teachers, a consultant employed by the college and two members of the interim management committee including the chair. The inspector also spoke with a representative of the Baker Dearing Trust.

The inspector carried out joint learning walks with the vice principal and observed pupils during lessons and social times. A scrutiny of pupils' work was also undertaken. The inspector reviewed the college's safeguarding policies and practices and checked the single central record. The inspector also considered the 16 parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Context

Following the previous inspection, the chief executive officer (CEO) resigned. The trust appointed the acting principal as interim CEO. The trust formed an interim management committee (IMC). The external review of governance has been commissioned and is underway. A discussion was held during the inspection with the national leader of governance who is leading the review. Governors are actively looking into the possibility of joining a multi-academy trust.

Senior leadership roles were redesigned last term. The assistant principal with responsibility for the sixth form was appointed as vice principal to lead on teaching, learning and assessment. There are now four assistant principals. Six teachers left the college at the end of the summer term. Six teachers have been appointed across several subject areas. The director of science, the progress leader for key stage 4, the special educational needs coordinator and the attendance officer joined the college in September 2017. The college has not yet recruited to full capacity.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Members of the IMC are knowledgeable and have a range of relevant expertise. They are committed to the UTC ethos and are very supportive of the changes that the acting principal has made. Members of the IMC hold leaders to account well, balancing this with strong support.

The acting principal has provided much-needed stability to the college and has developed a clear vision for improvement. Staff say that morale has improved and that they are well supported. One teacher commented: 'The acting principal is passionate for the college and very clear about what needs to happen. We are a lot happier and everyone wants to do better.'

Leaders have made a positive start in addressing the areas identified as needing improvement in the previous inspection. The action plan provides a clear response to the areas for improvement. Planned actions are specific and success criteria are clear. The acting principal has developed and communicated clear expectations for all leaders and teachers. There is now a greater clarity to senior leaders' roles and responsibilities.

Leaders have taken prompt and effective action to improve the college's safeguarding arrangements. Consequently, the college's safeguarding arrangements are now effective. A culture of vigilance is now evident in the college's work. The acting principal and the senior leader with responsibility for safeguarding pupils meet regularly to discuss safeguarding issues. Records show that there are regular and frequent reviews of each vulnerable individual's case. Effective relationships exist with external agencies. These are used in a timely manner to support vulnerable pupils. Leaders check carefully the outcomes of any referrals made. Staff who spoke to the inspector were knowledgeable about the college's safeguarding policies and procedures and were clear about what actions to take should an incident occur. Governors ensure that they hold leaders to account concerning safeguarding arrangements. All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe and well cared for at college.

College leaders say that they are now given enough time to fulfil their responsibilities. A qualified teacher has been employed to cover lessons for absent staff. This has enabled teachers to focus on preparing lessons for their timetabled classes. Leaders have taken steps to review the curriculum and timetable to minimise the number of split classes in key stage 4.

Leaders ensure that pupils are provided with impartial careers advice to make informed decisions about their options in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. This ensures that pupils start courses that are appropriately based on their prior attainment as well as their career aspirations. As a result, most pupils are now happy with the subjects that they are studying.

Leaders are monitoring more closely the quality of teaching and learning through, for example, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. Leaders reviewed assessment procedures in the summer term. They acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure that assessment and predictions are accurate across each subject area.

Leaders provide support and professional development for staff who need extra help to improve aspects of their teaching. Teachers are appreciative of the opportunities that they are given to work together so that they can share good practice. Leaders are hosting placements for School Direct trainee teachers in subjects where they are confident that there is effective support available.

Leaders have begun to engage more effectively with parents through a parents' forum that is open to any parent to attend. Leaders are involving parents more in decisions about their children. All parents who completed Parent view, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the college to others.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are early signs that the quality of teaching is beginning to improve. For example, teachers use questioning more effectively. Pupils commented that teaching has improved. One pupil said: 'We can concentrate better in lessons and we get through a lot more.'

Teachers are starting to plan work that is tailored to pupils' needs, although sometimes the level of work is not appropriate. Leaders agree that there is still more work to be done to ensure that all teachers have consistently high expectations and all pupils are challenged to do the best that they can. For example, appropriate planning and challenge, particularly for the most able pupils, are not prevalent in the mathematics department.

Leaders are working closely with middle leaders and teachers to ensure that accurate assessment information is used to plan lessons to meet pupils' needs. New assessment systems have very recently been introduced in the sixth form. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives on pupils' and students' outcomes.

Leaders carry out frequent observations of teaching. Where work scrutiny is carried out, it focuses on compliance with the college's marking policy.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they feel safe and that behaviour has improved. They say that staff treat them with respect and respond well to their personal and academic needs.

Pupils are polite and courteous. Their conduct between lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime is calm and orderly. In the vast majority of lessons, pupils are focused on their work and interested in their learning. Leaders are visible around college and reinforce the expectations of uniform. Pupils wear their uniforms with pride, and keep the college environment free from litter and graffiti.

Pupils understand the system of rewards for good behaviour and know the consequences if their behaviour falls below the college's high expectations. As a result, fixed-term exclusions have reduced since the last inspection. No pupil was permanently excluded in the last two years.

Pupils say that less bullying occurs now as they have been taught to be more accepting of individual differences. Pupils are confident that any bullying or discrimination will be taken seriously. College records show that incidents of prejudiced-based bullying have declined sharply and are rare.

Leaders have put in place several strategies to improve attendance this year, including the use of rewards, and employing an attendance officer who works closely with families. Overall attendance is now in line with the national average for secondary schools. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is falling but still remains high.

Pupils' views are now better represented in the college through a pupil leadership team who meet regularly. Pupils are involved in supporting a number of college events and their views on issues such as local partnerships have influenced college policy. Pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they now receive helpful careers advice. Students in the sixth form receive helpful support with university applications. A high proportion of students who left the sixth form in 2017 went on to higher or further education, apprenticeships or employment.

Leaders have improved the opportunities for pupils and students to undertake suitable work experience with local employers. Leaders accept that there is further work to do to improve students' employability skills by engaging sponsors and other business partners.

Outcomes for pupils

The first cohort of pupils to attend the college sat their public examinations in 2017.

The proportion of pupils who achieved a grade 4 in English and in mathematics was higher than the national average in 2017. The unvalidated data for 2017 indicates that by the end of key stage 4, pupils including disadvantaged pupils have made slow progress during key stage 3 at their predecessor school and key stage 4 at the college.

In the sixth form, examination results in 2017 show that students on vocational courses did better than those who completed academic courses. The college had predicted 100% pass rate, which was overly optimistic. Historically, entry requirements for students to progress on to these courses were not always robust enough and this meant that some students did not have the appropriate levels of prior attainment to succeed. Leaders have recognised this issue and amended the entry requirements accordingly.

Current assessment information suggests that pupils are making better progress than in the previous year. However, leaders acknowledge that they still have work to do to ensure the accuracy of assessments and predictions. This will be examined at the next monitoring inspection.

External support

Last year, the college received support from Heath School, through a 'school to school' support programme. The IMC has brokered support from Tauheedul Education Trust (TET) and a review of mathematics was undertaken by one of their consultants in July 2017 and will be followed up with further support. Additional support from Tauheedul Education Trust for the development of the college consists of mentoring for senior and middle leaders and quality assurance. The college continues to employ a consultant who supports leaders with school improvement work.