



Gillian Keegan MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills
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15 July 2020

Jeremy Cartwright
Chair of Governors
Stoke on Trent College
Stoke Road
Shelton
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DG

Dear Jeremy,

I am writing following the intervention assessment of Stoke on Trent College by the Further Education (FE) Commissioner on 9 to 10 March 2020, which was conducted following a third consecutive 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted rating in October 2019 and an FE Commissioner diagnostic assessment monitoring visit in November 2019. You have already seen the draft report and recommendations. As you will be aware, routine FEC work was paused due to the coronavirus crisis, so the final version of this report has been delayed in reaching you.

The FE Commissioner's report describes Stoke on Trent College as having faced numerous challenges throughout its recent history, including significant financial concerns, substantial changes to its senior management, and disappointing Ofsted results. Whilst significant challenges remain, the college has adopted a positive approach towards implementing various improvement initiatives to address both historic and recent concerns.

Quality improvement is being driven by managers who are clearly enthusiastic and focused on improving attendance, areas of poor achievement, and teaching, learning and assessment. The recent focus on improving communications and engagement between the CEO, senior team and college staff is also a positive development that plays an important role in building staff confidence and trust at a time when cooperation and transparency is vital. This level, quality and frequency of communication and engagement is good practice and should be fully embedded and increased to further improve staff morale.

Following significant changes to the college's senior leadership team over the past several years, there have been promising recent developments in restoring stable financial leadership, which in turn have improved the college's financial position. The appointment of a Chief Financial Officer and a strong MIS team have placed the college on the path to Good financial health, and this should serve as an example of how strong and stable leadership are fundamental to promoting substantial improvement.

Whilst I acknowledge the college's enthusiasm in driving forward its improvement initiatives, I am conscious that it is too early to assess the effect of these measures at this stage. I am also concerned that some of the college's initiatives may become unsustainable in the long term, particularly in relation to quality improvement, where the absence of a senior leader with a defined curriculum and quality oversight role is likely to impede progress. I am therefore in full agreement with the FE Commissioner's recommendation that a Vice Principal should be appointed to provide dedicated leadership to quality work.

I also advise that you implement the FE Commissioner's recommendations for the executive team to utilise an external expert's support to establish and strengthen itself as soon as possible, and to fill vacant financial posts with high quality candidates to further support the Chief Financial Officer.

I have accepted all the recommendations of the FE Commissioner and a copy of the assessment is provided with this letter. A copy of this letter and the summary report will also be sent to the following local MPs, whose constituencies are served by the college, to inform them of the FE Commissioner's findings:

- Jonathan Gullis MP Stoke-on-Trent North
- Jo Gideon MP Stoke-on-Trent Central
- Jack Brereton MP Stoke-on-Trent South
- Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP Staffordshire Moorlands
- Aaron Bell MP Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Fiona Bruce MP Congleton

Yours sincerely,



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