

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



15 October 2010

Mr R Hawkins
Headteacher
Smith's Wood Sports College
Windward Way
Smith's Wood
Birmingham
B36 0UE

Dear Mr Hawkins

Ofsted 2010–2011 survey inspection programme: assessing pupils' progress (APP)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 5 October 2010 to evaluate the impact of the APP initiative.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: scrutiny of documentation; observations of teaching and learning; and discussions with students, staff, a representative of the local authority and the college's National Challenge Adviser.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is good.

The APP initiative

Impact on students' achievement and attainment

- APP has enhanced achievement in virtually all subjects although the impact has been greatest in the targeted subjects of mathematics, science, information and communication technology and, particularly, English. APP has been highly instrumental in enabling students to understand what they must do to reach their targets. As a result, attainment has risen and is now close to the national average overall and above average in English.
- APP has contributed to the improved effectiveness of the college's approach to monitoring the progress of students, including those groups

that have achieved less well in the past. Teachers' assessments are more accurate and specific weaknesses in students' learning are more clearly identified.

- The achievement of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving because the better use of assessment information ensures extra guidance and support are well-targeted.

Impact on the quality of students' learning and progress

- APP is helping to improve teachers' and students' knowledge of the small steps students need to take to reach longer-term targets. APP has contributed to the development of a common language that can be used to discuss precisely what is needed to maximise progress.
- Students are making better progress because they are taking much more responsibility for their learning. For example, they are quite skilled at identifying how they can improve their work.
- The impact of APP is most apparent in English where the highly effective use of assessment results in students making outstanding progress.
- The success students have experienced in reaching their targets more quickly has improved attitudes to learning and behaviour in the college.

Impact on the quality of teaching and the use of assessment to support learning

- APP has contributed to the inclusion of 'enhanced objectives' in lessons which have increased the level of challenge for all learners. The most effective planning also highlights how students and teachers can regularly check the learning taking place in lessons.
- As a result of APP, teachers are sharing assessment criteria with students more consistently and involving them regularly in gauging progress and identifying the improvements needed to reach their challenging targets.
- As a result of a great deal of student involvement in peer- and self-assessment and better marking by teachers, students receive clear feedback on what they must do to reach their targets.
- The use of 'learning journeys' in English has been highly instrumental in linking lesson objectives and students' longer-term targets. In other subjects, students have a less secure understanding of how the objectives in a lesson relate to their individual targets.
- In the more effective practice, teachers use assessment well to adjust learning to meet the needs of students as the lesson proceeds. This includes questioning to check that all students have thought deeply about the key ideas. However, occasionally, when teachers accept answers from willing volunteers, they miss opportunities to check the extent to which all students have grasped the concepts being taught.
- The school has used the implementation of APP to involve more teachers in taking a lead in managing teaching and learning. This has included the

management of strategies to ensure the consistent interpretation of assessment criteria within the school and across the local authority.

- Cross-phase discussions have supported more vulnerable students when they move between institutions.
- The quality of the information communicated to parents has improved.

Impact on the curriculum

- APP is helping students to develop the skills of self-assessment. Consequently, they are better prepared for the courses in Key Stage 4 and beyond, particularly those with continuous forms of assessment.
- APP, in contributing to an increased emphasis on individual targets, has supported the implementation of a more challenging and thematic curriculum in Key Stage 3.
- Greater clarity about learning outcomes, resulting from the use of APP, is allowing students to make choices about their learning, particularly in English, science and vocational subjects.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- increasing opportunities for all students to engage with questioning that develops higher order thinking skills.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop assessment practice in support of school improvement.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector