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Mr A Hardy
Acting Principal
Barnfield West Academy
Emerald Road
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Dear Mr Hardy

Ofsted 2010–11 good practice survey: value for money in schools

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my recent visit on 9 November 2010 to look at how the school achieves good value for money.

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: interviews and discussion with senior managers, members of staff and the chairman of Barnfield Academies Trust; discussions with students; and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice

- Highly effective collaborative working within the Barnfield federation, to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for students, while securing significant cost savings.
- The development of key cross-federation roles, for example in teaching and learning, in new technologies and finance, to enhance the quality of provision and effective use of resources.
- A strong focus on investing to develop internal capacity and expertise, thereby reducing reliance on external providers. This supports good staff and management development, as well as significantly reducing costs.
- Good use of student performance data and personal information to monitor progress thoroughly and inform teachers' planning for, and assessment of, individuals' progress.

- Excellent use of the expertise and the established practice of the academy's further education college sponsor, to promote best practice and share resources and expertise across the federation, leading to improved provision and systems, and significant cost savings across the federation.
- Careful oversight of expenditure through review of monthly management accounts by senior and middle leaders.
- Effective use of economies of scale to secure significant cost savings in procuring goods and services, including: information and communication technology; refectory and payroll services; and financial and project management.
- Regular review of the effectiveness of strategies to secure improvement and rapid responses where strategies are not resulting in the expected improvements.
- Commissioning of external reports on financial performance, which provide detailed and comprehensive data on current expenditure including different types of staff costs. This enables managers to identify how staff might be deployed more effectively and efficiently to meet the academies' ambitious educational objectives.
- Careful cross-federation planning for the new sixth form, clearly focused on widening opportunities for students' progression and meeting local needs, while ensuring financially viable class sizes.

Areas for development

- There were no significant areas for development, but we discussed ways in which the academy could use the recent financial benchmarking data to refine the school's evaluation of value for money.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector