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17 February 2011

Mrs Gillian Dunlop
The Headteacher
Cranbury College
Cranbury Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 2TS

Dear Mrs Dunlop

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Cranbury College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your college on 16 February 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to all of the students, staff and the representative from the management committee with whom we held discussions.

As a result of the inspection on 5 November 2009, the college was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Students enter the college with significant gaps in their skills and knowledge, and with a negative view about themselves and towards education. The amount of time students spend at the college varies, but the rate of progress is such that the large majority of students are successful in making up lost time and overcoming several of the substantial barriers they faced when they started. As a result of this good progress, younger students leave ready to return to mainstream education. Although attainment is below that found nationally, older students are increasingly successful in gaining nationally accredited awards including GCSE, or equivalent. Art is a particular strength. College tracking data show that students currently in Year 11 are reaching higher levels of attainment than last year's group, particularly in the core skills of literacy and numeracy.

The college contributes a great deal to students' academic and personal achievements. Students say they feel safe and like attending an environment where their views are valued and clear expectations are consistently applied. Although relationships are often fragile, students are polite and talk with staff and visitors in a mature and respectful manner. Students' positive attitudes towards activities, including art and music, have led to the students taking a greater pride in their work. Students have clear aspirations for success in gaining qualifications for their future careers, valuing the wide range of opportunities provided by the college. Attendance, which continues to improve securely and quickly, reflects these changes to the students' approach to education and improved confidence. For many, it is the first time they have attended school on anything like a regular basis and the level of improvement is dramatic within a relatively short period.

The college's awareness of its strengths and weaknesses is informed by increasingly precise and effective self-evaluation processes. These are underpinned by a comprehensive training programme for staff, a systematic approach to monitoring to help ensure consistency, and the college's high expectations of what students can achieve. The college tracks students' progress with growing accuracy and rigour. Staff use data from marking and assessments to provide students with clear feedback on how well they are learning. This is translated into behaviour and curriculum targets which are shared with the students in ways that are most appropriate to their age and abilities. As a result, students make particularly good progress in learning about themselves and improving their self-esteem because of the well-informed and individualised support provided by staff and other professionals. In lessons, learning intentions are usually clear and explicit, and detailed planning makes reference to National Curriculum levels or external examination requirements. Questioning is often used effectively to probe students' understanding and help adjust the pace of learning. However, on occasion, students are not always fully involved in the tasks. Nevertheless, students have an increasing understanding of the quality of their work, how it compares to the national picture, and how they can improve it.

The college welcomes and engages effectively with the local authority and the School Improvement Partner. These successful partnerships have worked successfully to bring about improvements to the reliability about students' data and to increase the capacity of leadership at all levels.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your college. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009.

- Improve assessment processes by:
 - providing focused, accurate and regular evaluations of students' progress
 - ensuring staff are fully trained in all aspects of assessment and that processes are suitably monitored
 - providing students with clear learning targets which help them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Further improve attendance.