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Dear Dr Clark

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 February 2011 to look at the leadership of the federation. Please pass on my thanks to the parents and governors who also gave up their time and made a valuable contribution to the visit.

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 with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; visits to lessons; and discussions with the chair of governors and the school improvement partner.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Context

The federation consists of Elsley Primary Special Community School and Nightingale Secondary Special Community School. Both schools provide for boys who have statements of special educational need related to social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. The schools were federated in September 2007 and since 2010 have been housed on the same campus. In their most recent Ofsted inspections both schools were graded as outstanding across a range of criteria including overall effectiveness. Governors are actively exploring the addition of a mainstream primary school into the federation.

Outcomes

- Students in both schools make exceptional progress. Since the establishment of the federation this represents transformational change for Elsley School and a trend of strong continued improvement for Nightingale School. At whatever stage they join the schools, the progress that students make is at least good and in the majority of cases outstanding. In particular, they make very good progress in developing literacy, numeracy and oracy skills. Increasingly, by the end of Key Stage 4, students are attaining examination qualifications whether at GCSE or vocational levels. It is a testimony to the skills of managers, teachers and support staff that some students are considering university courses while more now enroll on college programmes, at the Nightingale Sixth Form Centre, or take up employment and training opportunities. Some become vocational instructor apprentices within the federation.
- The federation has impacted on the establishment and development across both schools of robust systems to monitor progress, attendance, intervention and behaviour. Behaviour is good and this represents outstanding progress for the majority of students. Students are learning to treat each other and adults with respect and consideration; they grow in their own self-awareness and self-confidence and are more able to cope with setbacks within or outside school. The exceptional nurturing ethos and well-structured systems and procedures support and enable their progress both as students, as individuals and members of a community. Attendance has improved and students enjoy school and the challenges and experiences that are offered.

Provision

- Since the start of the federation, approaches to teaching and learning have undergone significant change. Teaching at both schools was recognised in their most recent Ofsted inspections as outstanding and one quickly sees why. Sessions are very well structured. Well-considered strategies enable students to settle quickly, respond positively to others and engage in learning. Teachers use exceptional skills to tackle individual issues or group conflicts, reconcile them and move students on to engage in learning activities. Morning breakfast in lower school classes give ample opportunity for students to develop social and discursive skills and begin each day confidently and calmly. Classrooms are exceptionally well planned offering a cluster of experience from kitchen to office to formal classroom to play or experimental areas.
- The curriculum is outstanding and still developing under the federation structure. The addition of very active vocational areas has impacted on student engagement and progress. The motor vehicular workshop, bricking room, hairdressing salon, painting and decorating flat and boxing gym exude energy, commitment and active learning. Literacy, numeracy and oracy skills are being embedded within each of these learning and skills environments. The farm, with its menagerie of animals including alpacas, fulfills the acquisition of additional skills. It is a testimony to their quality and that of the vocational instructors that other schools use these

facilities. The recently introduced sixth form has further impacted on curriculum and progression opportunities. The federation leadership recognises the need now to further develop the extended school curriculum.

- The students fully understand the school's systems for rewards and sanctions and the overwhelming majority show a commitment to meeting the high expectations held of them. Outstanding guidance and care and an all-inclusive nurturing environment are very well supported by group and individual therapy sessions. A host of other additional support opportunities exist including a federation doctor. Students are highly confident of staff and welcome their support and guidance. The federation places great emphasis on contacts with parents, who both appreciate and support the ethos of the federation.

Leadership and management

- You bring exceptional skills of strategic and operational thinking, empathy, reconciliation, vision and risk-taking that have enabled you to change two poor and failing schools into a remarkable and outstanding federation. The two schools now engage in such a seamless fashion that one would assume that only one school existed. Senior staff give exceptional support. Teachers and support staff respond and embrace this ethos and develop their exceptional motivational and engagement skills with students. Governors provide strong support and challenge to management and to the federation's continued development and sense of ambition.
- In particular, federation has impacted on the establishment of robust tracking, monitoring and intervention systems that strongly support the progress that students make. Data are used very well. A coherence of assessment between Key Stages 2 and 3 has been established which has enabled very smooth and individual targeted transition. Federation has enabled the more systematic planning of resources, a broader curriculum, and exceptional support facilities. Consequently, the impact in both schools is that students make excellent progress, behave well and start the development and refinement of key individual and social skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing further extended school provision.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector