

18 May 2005

Mr A Griffiths  
Headteacher  
Ellowes Hall School Specialist Sports College  
Stickley Lane  
Lower Gornal  
Dudley  
West Midlands  
DY3 2JH

Dear Mr Griffiths

**Implementation of Ellowes Hall School Specialist Sports College's Sixth-Form Action Plan**

Following the visit of Mr C J Redman HMI to the sixth form of your school on 5 and 6 May 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the sixth form was designated as inadequate. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the students' standards of attainment and their progress, the quality of education; the leadership and management of the sixth form; and the progress that has been made in implementing the sixth-form action plan.

The school's action plan for the sixth form is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. The weakness outlined in the second paragraph of the note of the inspection findings should be addressed and amendments prepared by the second monitoring inspection.

The LEA's statement of action is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. The LEA has been asked to address the weaknesses identified and prepare amendments by the second monitoring inspection.

The sixth form has made reasonable progress since being designated as inadequate.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for

Dudley, and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid  
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

cc: chair of governors  
LEA  
LSC

## **Implementation of Ellowes Hall School Specialist Sports College's Sixth-Form Action Plan**

### Findings of the first monitoring inspection since the sixth form became designated as inadequate

During the visit ten parts of lessons, a registration session and the sixth-form tutor period were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, the head of sixth form and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with students, and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, the head of sixth form, the deputy headteacher, an external consultant and a representative from the LEA.

Following the school's inspection in November 2004, the headteacher, staff and governors drew up a suitably structured action plan to address the key areas for improvement. In many respects, its content is appropriate to bring about most of the required improvements in the sixth-form provision. However, in some areas the actions or milestones are not adequately defined, for example how advice to potential students will be improved, and too many of the key milestones are actions rather than points of achievement. Some actions do not address the key areas adequately, for example, the provision of religious education or a daily act of corporate worship. While many actions are accompanied by resource costings, it is not clear how the school will develop its sixth-form accommodation within its current buildings and maintenance budget, or what the cost will be. Success criteria are listed, but they do not have sufficient qualitative and quantitative measurable outcomes, for example in students' attainment or in the quality of teaching and learning. The personnel involved with implementing actions are defined, but it is not always clear who is accountable for ensuring satisfactory completion of the actions or who is to monitor the school's progress; governors are not adequately identified as being involved with monitoring. It is not sufficiently clear how the leadership and management of the sixth form are to be improved.

The LEA's commentary on the school's action plan is good and provides valuable recommendations for improvement; its own plan of action is broadly satisfactory, but is insufficiently precise about how its resources will be deployed to support improvements in provision. The arrangements for monitoring the school's development are good. The most significant weakness in the plan is the omission of success criteria to judge whether the school's progress is adequate and how well it is contributing to post-16 education locally.

The students' attainment on AS/A level courses has declined over the past five years. The average point score per student has fallen; it was 129.7 in 2004 which was well below the national average. In lessons, standards varied widely, but few of the students achieved above average levels; the best attainment was in art and English. Weak literacy skills, particularly speaking, frequently inhibited progress. The issues raised about low standards in the November 2004 inspection report remain.

The quality of teaching varied between very good and unsatisfactory; it was good overall. In seven lessons, the teaching was good or better; it was very good in English, art and religious education. The teaching was unsatisfactory in one lesson.

The best teaching was characterised by: a good structure that used a range of teaching and learning techniques; very good exposition, demonstrating the teacher's good subject knowledge; challenging questioning and activities; thorough marking and assessment; and excellent relationships with the students.

Where the teaching was weakest, it was not adequately rigorous so that there was insufficient challenge in the work. Where the groups were very small the teaching and learning styles were restricted and access to techniques such as discussion or group work was impractical.

The quality of learning, including the progress made by the students, was satisfactory or better in nine lessons; it was good or better in four, including an art lesson where it was very good. It was unsatisfactory in a leisure and recreation lesson. Although the quality of learning was closely linked to the quality of teaching, it was not as effective overall.

The students used their time well and persevered with the tasks set despite often finding them challenging. They listened carefully to their teacher and each other. Their speaking was below the levels typical of students following Level 3 courses and too often they lacked the vocabulary to express their ideas clearly. Where the groups were small, the students were over dependent on the teacher to make adequate progress. Their recall of previous work was weak. They researched facts well, often using a variety of media, but their use of these facts to draw conclusions was too often ineffective. Weak literacy and numeracy restricted the progress of several students.

Attitudes to learning and the students' behaviour were good in all lessons and very good in seven. The students clearly valued the teaching they received, showed interest in their work and an enthusiasm for learning. Relationships with their teachers and with other students were very good. The positive attitudes of the students were illustrated by very good attendance and good punctuality to lessons.

The leadership of the sixth form is in transition between two teachers, but the changeover has not been adequately managed; it has led to some confusion over accountabilities and responsibilities. There is no current job description for the head of sixth form defining expectations of the role. The new incumbent understands realistically what she will be accountable for, but is not sufficiently clear about the manner in which she is expected to lead and manage this area of the school; for example, how teaching methods will be adapted to ensure more effective learning, or how teaching and learning will be monitored and managed. The lack of clarity is inhibiting some of the initiatives for improvement, particularly the introduction of more effective approaches to intervention techniques when regular assessments show that students' progress is unsatisfactory and policies to address the students' special educational needs. As a result, the quality of leadership and management of the sixth form has not improved sufficiently.

The governors have supported the school well. They took a full part in making representations to the LEA about the reported decision to close the sixth form and to justify why the local community required a sixth form; this recognised the historic low aspirations and inexperience of post-16 education within the community. A governors' committee has been established to address sixth-form issues. They are looking at ways to improve their knowledge and to hold the school to account for its actions more effectively.

The LEA's support for the school has been unsatisfactory. After the November 2004 inspection, an elected member of the LEA was quoted in the local press as stating that the sixth form would close. The school had not been informed of the decision previously and made vigorous representations to the LEA to retain the sixth form. As a result, much of the time after the inspection was taken with clarifying the situation rather than addressing the key areas for improvement quickly. Clarity still does not exist because there is no firm decision on the sixth form's future; the uncertainty has adversely affected the school's strategic management. In addition, the LEA has not provided sufficient support for writing the governors' action plan, nor in advising how to address key weaknesses identified in the inspection report; it has not indicated whether it is prepared to support financially some of the school's plans to improve sixth-form accommodation. Communication between the school, the LEA and the LSC has been unsatisfactory.

## **Action taken to address the areas for improvement**

### **1: provide a curriculum which is more closely matched to the needs of students**

Sensible decisions have been made to rationalise the sixth-form curriculum by collaborating with the local further education college, harmonising the sixth-form timetable with the college and introducing three Level 2 vocational courses. There is a clear intention to provide a curriculum that will be sufficiently wide and flexible to cater for the needs of students with a range of previous attainment. For example, subjects to be retained by the school have been chosen after an analysis of predicted GCSE results. The decisions to base some Level 3 courses at the local college are pragmatic and there is a possibility that the college will provide a psychology teacher for Ellowes Hall School Specialist Sports College if sufficient numbers are recruited. There is also a possibility of students from elsewhere attending the school to study music technology. The introduction of Level 2 courses is more problematic; the school and LEA are uncertain how they will be financed and initial estimates of recruitment indicate that few of the current Year 11 pupils have expressed an interest in following them. Nevertheless, the school has worked hard to broaden and rationalise the curriculum although the effectiveness of these actions will not be clear until next term.

Progress is reasonable.

### **2: provide better advice to students joining the sixth form**

Year 11 pupils are provided with a suitable range of advice, including information about opportunities to pursue their education at other institutions. There is a sensible intention to be rigorous in applying a minimum qualification of five or more GCSE grades A\* to C before accepting students on to a full Level 3 course. Projected numbers suggest about 50 students will embark on these courses in September 2005, a marked increase on the numbers in the previous year. However, the projected numbers for Level 2 courses, at only nine students, are small.

Progress is reasonable.

### **3: ensure a greater focus by managers on the work of the sixth form**

As a result of the November inspection, the focus on the work of the sixth form has improved markedly. Considerable efforts have been made to build partnerships with other local providers of post-16 education and to learn from the experience of other schools that have been successful in extending their sixth-form provision.

However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of recent changes in leadership and management, and other changes, for example, to the curriculum, have yet to be implemented.

Progress with this key area is reasonable.

#### **4: provide a daily act of collective worship for all students**

The school has yet to introduce a daily act of collective worship. The sixth-form tutor period had no act of worship but, in the morning registration session, the tutor read out the thought for the day and there was a very brief time for the students to think about it.

Progress is limited.

#### **5: provide religious education for sixth-form students**

While the existing plans for September 2005 are good and will improve the provision for religious education, they rely too greatly on six one-day events and do not constitute an adequate course. Nevertheless, recent ideas to develop these days as a starting point for further sessions are good.

Progress is reasonable.