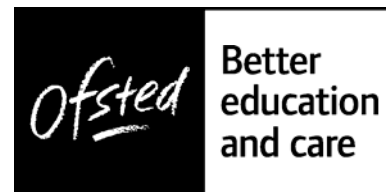


Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division
4th Floor
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Direct Tel 020 7421 6594
Direct Fax 020 7421 6855

www.ofsted.gov.uk



3 May 2005

Mr A Andres
Principal
New College
Glenfield Road
Leicester
LE3 6DN

Dear Mr Andres

Implementation of New College's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr C Humphreys HMI, Ms S Morrissey HMI, Mr D Jones HMI and Mr D Rzeznik HMI to your college on 25 and 26 April 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the college; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The college has made limited progress since the last monitoring inspection and limited progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Leicester City Council. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW COLLEGE'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the fourth monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures

During the visit 43 lessons or parts of lessons, three registration sessions and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the interim principal, several senior staff, the Director of Achievement and Innovation for Leicester, and a consultant brokered by the DfES. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the interim principal, the Director of Achievement and Innovation for Leicester, an adviser from the LEA, a consultant brokered by the DfES, and two senior staff.

The college's difficulties have been extremely complex, and there have been several obstacles to improvement. For some time, the LEA and the governors have failed to ensure that the college moves forward at an acceptable pace. The governors recently requested that the LEA remove their delegated powers, and the LEA returned with an offer to establish an Interim Executive Board (IEB). The DfES and governing body both agreed to this. The IEB has not yet met, but the people appointed to the IEB have a wide range of appropriate experience, and the creation of the IEB has been well received by the LEA and the governors.

The most pressing need for the IEB is to tackle firmly the proper removal of a number of teachers who have consistently shown over a long period of time that they cannot provide teaching of an adequate standard, despite having received appropriate support and warnings about their work. Also, the need to take legal action against parents who have persistently allowed their pupils to miss school is long overdue, since levels of attendance at the college are, and have been for several years, appallingly low. This work is urgent. The interim principal has made clear requests to secure more robust support on both these issues, but opportunities to take action, which have required the agreement of the governors and the local authority, have been missed. One positive development is that the college's long-standing and considerable budget deficit will officially no longer be the college's responsibility, and that the college will be allowed to keep its underspend from last financial year to help with school improvement.

Standards of attainment across the school remain very low. The pupils generally complete too little work in lessons and this is an impediment to raising standards. Too much work is poorly presented and unfinished. Too many pupils come to lessons without the right equipment. The pupils made satisfactory progress in only 28 of the 43 lessons. They rarely made good progress, although there were examples in a few Key Stage 4 classes where the pupils made effective gains in their knowledge and understanding. The pupils' low self-esteem is often a barrier to their progress, but more often it is the weaknesses in teaching that prevent them from learning effectively.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in only 28 of the 43 lessons, which include 12 lessons where they were good. Their behaviour often reflected the quality of the teaching, although in a few lessons that were effectively taught, the teacher still had to manage some poor behaviour. In the corridors there were many examples of boisterous behaviour, including swearing, shouting and pushing. A significant number of pupils wandered in the corridors during lessons. However, certain parts of the college were calmer than others, thanks to the more diligent and effective supervision of the staff in that area. When asked, the pupils could say which were the corridors where they behaved well, to avoid the sanction of detention, and which were the corridors where their bad behaviour would go unchallenged. The college leadership team holds a view that behaviour around the school has improved, and to a degree it has; it is less aggressive than it was at the time of the first monitoring inspection. Also, in the Year 8 assembly, the pupils behaved well and responded positively to the distribution of certificates for good behaviour with spontaneous applause. However, these improvements are fragile and there is still more to do.

The very high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is undermining the college's good efforts to secure sustainable improvements. Where the pupils' behaviour, for example, is too boisterous, it is invariably linked to weaknesses in the teaching. Also, pupils observed leaving a lesson which had been poorly taught were seen behaving badly in the corridors between lessons, whereas pupils leaving lessons that were taught well were usually calmer. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is far too high. In the unsatisfactory lessons, it is more often the case that school policies and approaches are implemented inconsistently, which dilutes their effectiveness. For example, pupils do not wear their uniform as consistently as they have done in previous monitoring visits because too many of their teachers fail to insist on it. In the unsatisfactory lessons the pupils' bad behaviour goes unchallenged, and the teachers who receive the pupils in the following lesson often have to calm them and work hard during the first part of the lesson to secure proper order. In too many lessons the pupils' work is not adequately marked and too few teachers use sound assessment practices to help pupils improve their work. The overall impact of the unsatisfactory teaching has led to some of the college's problems being endemic.

There is a number of appropriate policies in place, and where they are used systematically they are effective. Recent staff appointments have increased the number of teachers who work hard and are anxious to see improvements, but there is not yet a sense of the whole school pulling together to make things better.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in only 30 of the 43 lessons, but this includes ten lessons where the teaching was good or better. In the best lessons, such as in a Year 11 science lesson on atomic structure, the teacher set a brisk pace and had high expectations. The pupils responded appropriately, showing interest and applying themselves well. In the well-taught lessons there was clear evidence of teachers implementing and making effective use of whole-school policies. However, the number of such lessons is not high enough to

form the critical mass required to establish a whole-school ethos that is properly focused on learning and achievement.

In the lessons judged to be satisfactory overall, the pupils were not always pressed to work as hard as they should, although their behaviour was managed appropriately and there was a suitable sequence of planned activities. Conversely, in the lessons that were unsatisfactory, the pupils' behaviour was not always sufficiently well managed and the activities failed to engage their interests. In some of these lessons the range of teaching and learning styles was too limited, often involving the teacher talking for longer than the pupils were able to concentrate. In the weakest lessons the teaching was completely ineffective, with the pupils generally ignoring the teacher or in some cases being insolent.

The improvements to the post-16 curriculum are developing well. The courses are well suited to the needs of the pupils. The provision is well managed and there is a clear vision for developing this further in the coming years. Improvements to the 11 to 16 curriculum are developing more slowly as existing choices have to run their course. However, there are sound plans to provide the next Year 10 cohort with a range of courses that will better suit their needs and capabilities. This will be more fully evaluated in the next monitoring inspection.

Some staff have worked particularly hard and effectively to improve the confidence of the community in the college's work, particularly the parents. However, negative reporting in the local press has been very unhelpful and more work is needed to strengthen the college's fragile reputation.

The Director of Achievement and Innovation acknowledges that the causes of the college's slow progress are complex. However, the LEA is confident that the interim principal has the leadership and management skills required to move the college out of special measures. She sees the creation of an IEB as a positive step in helping the college move more quickly forward.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: raise standards of attainment throughout the college

Senior managers have secured a greater understanding of the use of target and assessment data to monitor the pupils' progress. As a consequence, underachieving pupils have been identified and targeted for intervention strategies to improve their performance. The college has continued to implement strategies to improve the pupils' attainment, including residential revision courses, coursework sessions and subject workshops, booster classes and mentoring. Based on the recent monitoring of pupils' progress, the college is confident that it will meet its target grades in the summer examinations.

A new reporting system has created a more systematic approach to tracking the pupils' progress. However, not all teachers are clear about the standards achieved

by pupils in their class and there is no arrangement by which all pupils can discuss with their teachers their level of attainment, the progress they have made and how they can improve. The recent conference to identify core values for the school has provided a blueprint for future improvement, although too many teachers fail to communicate agreed procedures and expectations to raise attainment.

There is still a considerably long way to go to raise standards to the level that reflects the pupils' capability. Progress on this key issue is limited.

Key Issue 2: improve the quality of teaching in order to improve the quality of the students' learning and the rate of progress they make

The college has helpfully produced a revised development plan to improve teaching and raise standards. The plan indicates an appropriate range of improvement initiatives, but the personnel, timescales, resources and success criteria to measure progress are missing. The alignment between the departmental self-reviews and the overarching development plan is not close enough. The quality of departmental self-evaluation remains varied and areas of weakness are not always being rectified.

The college does not have a coherent and consistent teaching and learning policy and this has hindered its progress. The appointment of a strategic director to oversee improvement in the quality of teaching is an important and necessary step. There is a lot to do to ensure initiatives are successfully and consistently embedded into school life. Sound strategies have been recently put in place to improve schemes of work and to collect data about students' progress over time, but these are still in the early stages of development.

A recent evaluation of the quality of teaching shows that the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching remains too high with 28 per cent of lessons observed being judged unsatisfactory or poor. Weaknesses in planning, the misbehaviour of students and inconsistency in practice remain. Too many students receive inadequate teaching and therefore do not achieve as well as they should. There has been no significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous monitoring inspection. Progress on this key issue is limited.

Key Issue 3: to improve the students' attitudes to learning, and their behaviour in lessons and around the college

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour remain unsatisfactory. The culture and ethos of the corridor is too often set by the pupils; staff supervision is inconsistent and as a result, the pupils' punctuality and behaviour vary from area to area. The college's behaviour management policies and procedures are appropriate. The behaviour policy introduced at the beginning of the school year has been a feature of an intensive staff training programme. The 'behaviour for learning' protocols are prominently displayed and the teachers refer to these consistently; however, implementation remains variable. In those lessons where the 'behaviour for

learning' protocols were part of challenging and engaging teaching, the pupils' remained focused and calm. Where lessons failed to involve the pupils their behaviour was often volatile and a significant proportion consistently ignored the teachers' instructions.

A significant proportion of the staff attended a major conference during the Easter holidays that focused on improving the college's ethos. The college is gathering a wide range of data that illuminates the outcomes of the pupils' negative attitudes; however, not enough is being done to link the weaknesses in learning and teaching with poor behaviour. There have been 348 exclusions since the beginning of the academic year and this is far too many.

Progress on this key issue is limited.

Key Issue 4: improve the students' attendance and punctuality to college and to lessons

The rate of attendance is poor. The figure for the spring term 2005 was well below the average for secondary schools at 78.9 per cent. Since the beginning of the summer term the attendance rate has improved marginally to 79.14 per cent. The rate of unauthorised absence in the spring term was very high at 14.32 per cent, with Year 11 pupils recording 18.64 per cent. The figures for the summer term show some improvement but remain very high in comparison with the average for secondary schools.

Significant numbers of pupils arrive late for the start of morning school; for example, 78 pupils arrived late on the second morning of this inspection. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, enhancing the monitoring and follow-up procedures without securing the co-operation of the pupils. The school reports that it has been unable to proceed with a series of 'Fast Track' prosecutions of recalcitrant parents.

Progress on this key issue is limited.

Key Issue 5: improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels

New appointments to the senior leadership team have been positive and have strengthened the capacity of the team to push college improvement forward in a more coherent way. There is, and rightly so, a fresh optimism among senior staff that better progress can be made; the college is well placed to move forward. There is also a greater sense of commonly shared educational direction and a more clearly understood sense of accountability is developing. In turn, this is facilitating the development of devolved leadership at different levels. Some middle managers continue to improve their skills, and some new appointments at this level have further strengthened the educational provision.

The principal is fully aware that he has presided over a period of time where the college has not made sufficient progress. However, he demonstrates thoughtful and insightful leadership and management skills. He has managed a range of difficult decisions in a well-considered and sometimes tenacious way. He is sensibly working with a number of different external agencies. The range of support available to the college is not coherently structured. At the moment, a clear sense of well co-ordinated, multi-agency co-operation across many of the college's areas of difficulty is lacking.

Despite positive recent developments in leadership and management, clear overall improvement in relation to standards, progress, attendance, teaching, and attitudes and behaviour has yet to materialise. Progress on this key issue is reasonable in relation to developing the capacity for improvement, but limited in the impact on the educational provision. Given the college has been in special measures for well over a year, this is limited progress overall.