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Mr A Griffiths  
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30 November 2005

Dear Mr Griffiths

## MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE ELLOWES HALL SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE'S INADEQUATE SIXTH FORM

### Introduction

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the sixth form was judged to be inadequate in November 2004.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with yourself, the head of sixth form, a group of students, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local education authority (LEA).

### Achievement and standards

The 2005 A level results were a marked improvement on the previous year. The average points score rose by 1.37 to 9.44 and the pass rate increased to 90% from only 77% in 2004. The rate of progress made by the students in their two years in the sixth form improved markedly, but it was significantly slower than the progress

typically made by students nationally. However, the progress made by the Year 12 students studying AS English literature was significantly above national figures.

In lessons, standards were mostly average, but few of the students reached high levels of attainment. The progress made was satisfactory.

### Personal development and well-being

Attitudes to learning and the behaviour of the students were very good. Attendance is good. The students enjoy their lessons, although many find the work challenging. Several students make a significant contribution to the school community, particularly by organising sixth form events, working for charities, improving the environment by building a garden, helping with after school activities and supporting younger pupils who wish to improve their reading. Last year students also helped Key Stage 3 pupils by acting as mentors. However, some students see the sixth form as a separate entity associated with the school, an attitude that is reflected in the significantly more relaxed dress code expected of students and the lack of formal responsibilities such as 'head students' or prefects; these duties are undertaken by Year 11 pupils. This dichotomy is currently restricting opportunities for the students to develop their leadership qualities and to act as role models for younger pupils.

The styles of teaching and learning are helping most students to work collaboratively and to equip them for future study or employment. However, the small sizes of groups studying some subjects, particularly in Year 13, restrict these opportunities.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory overall. Several elements of the teaching were good or outstanding. For example, in a Year 12 business studies applied lesson, careful attention was paid to improving the students' literacy skills and helping them develop good research and presentational skills. Peer assessment was used well to reinforce the criteria expected for each A level grade. In a Year 13 mathematics lesson students were helped to analyse their errors so that they could improve their examination technique. In all of the lessons the teaching reflected good subject knowledge, conscientious planning, and most teachers used a suitable range of teaching and learning styles. However, in several instances the weak literacy skills of many of the pupils were not adequately catered for so that their progress, whilst satisfactory, was rarely good. Weaknesses in extracting information from texts, analysing what the teacher or others said, and expressing ideas simply in writing or orally occurred in most lessons.

The planned changes to the curriculum have been implemented effectively. As a result, the school offers Year 12 students five Level 2 courses, including English and mathematics for those who wish to improve their grades, and 15 Level 3 courses, three of which are provided at the local college of technology. Seven are vocational courses, including three at Level 2. This has enabled students to select a mix of Level 2, 3 and 4 courses, if required, and to select courses to fit their aptitude and interests. The Year 13 curriculum has been improved by offering three courses at

the local college of technology. Although the number of subjects is small, recruitment to Year 12 improved so that group sizes are mostly appropriate and allow the teachers to use a full range of strategies to deliver the curriculum. Numbers in Year 13 are too small in most subjects restricting the curricular opportunities for the students.

The Year 12 students were given a suitable range of advice in Year 11 before they chose to remain at the school as sixth formers. Their options to study elsewhere were clearly explained and many of their peers chose other destinations such as the local college. The minimum qualifications for entry on to Level 3 courses, at least five GCSE passes at grade C or above, was enforced in nearly all cases. When I interviewed students they were able to explain a suitable rationale behind their selection of subjects.

Students report that their work is regularly marked and teachers provide careful help whenever required.

There is now a programme of relevant activities for morning tutorial sessions as well as the weekly assembly which comply with statutory requirements. A good ethos was established in the tutorial visited and the content contributed well to the students' spiritual, social and cultural development. Previous sessions had included presentations by the students. The students were proud of a 'Remembrance' notice board in the sixth form common room that included thoughts and poems from several of them celebrating the lives of a variety of personalities.

Students were able to report enthusiastically on the religious education element of their personal, social, health and citizenship programme, particularly 'The President's Day' when they considered moral, social, cultural and religious issues faced by a fictional African president. However, these good initiatives have yet to be structured into a formal programme of religious education.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- provide a curriculum which is more closely matched to the needs of students – good progress
- provide better advice to students joining the sixth form – good progress
- provide a daily act of collective worship – good progress
- provide religious education for sixth form students – satisfactory progress.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the sixth form have improved markedly and are now satisfactory. The students report that systems for assessing and reviewing their work are more consistently implemented and they are rigorously required to use effectively the time set aside for private study. Strategic management has improved particularly because actions for improvement have been clarified and success criteria are now well defined. Monitoring of teaching and learning has improved, but there

has been insufficient analysis of why the students' progress does not always reflect the quality of the teaching. The quality of the teaching monitored by the school is judged as good, but HMI's sample was satisfactory. Nevertheless, the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation of its sixth form provision is broadly satisfactory. Expectations of the students' conduct, what the school agrees to provide, and the role of parents, have been suitably clarified.

Provision for Year 12 has met the financial target of almost breaking even, but this has been achieved because of the requirement for students to take only three AS subjects rather than the more usual four, hence saving on staffing costs.

Governors continue to provide enthusiastic and determined support for the sixth form. They are working hard to identify how finance can be raised to improve the facilities and resources. They have suitably extended the sources of evidence used to monitor developments, including visiting the school while it is in session, and talking to sixth formers about their experiences of the school's provision. As a result, governance for the sixth form is now good.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- ensure a greater focus by managers on the work of the sixth form – satisfactory progress.

#### External support

The LEA's support for the school has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. It has clarified the criteria by which it will judge whether the post-16 education offered by the school is viable and of suitable quality to be retained. Its monitoring has been good and helpful advice has been offered to support developments. Collaborative arrangements with the local college of technology are good and valued by the students as a means of remaining as members of the school while also following their desired courses.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since the sixth form was identified as inadequate – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – good.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Provide more opportunities for students to develop as leaders and role models for younger pupils
- address the weak literacy skills that continue to restrict the students' progress
- write a programme for religious education.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Learning and Skills Council, and the Director of Education for Dudley.

Yours sincerely

C J Redman  
H M Inspector