

28 November 2005

Mr S Rees
Headteacher
Redcar Community College
Kirkleatham Lane
Redcar
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Dear Mr Rees

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF REDCAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit to your college with Additional Inspectors Ann Wallis and Jackie Sparkes on 24 and 25 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in May 2005.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior managers and other staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative of the Local Authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection in May 2005 there have been a few changes in staffing. Six teachers have left the school. Seven have joined the staff, three of these being on the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). Two more teachers are joining the mathematics department in January. There have been no significant changes in the school's circumstances.

Achievement and standards

Although remaining below the national average, the school's 2005 GCSE results have shown improvement compared with the previous year, and are in line with schools in similar circumstances. 45% of students achieved five or more passes at grades A* - C, which was just above the targets set by the school in agreement with the LA. This represents a 12% increase on 2004 achievement.

Achievement of five or more A* - C passes which include English and mathematics was reached by 19% of students and this remains well below the national average.

The best results were in expressive arts, drama, food technology, applied art & design and child development. The weakest results were in Spanish, engineering, ICT GCSE and statistics.

Although Key Stage 3 results in English, mathematics and science remain below average, good progress was made in mathematics, where the school met its target for achievement at the Level 5 and above. English and science results fell short of the school's expectations, with a particular concern over the low proportion achieving the upper Level 6. The school is aware that pupils' generally low levels of literacy skill are a barrier to improving success rates in higher level examinations. Consequently, one of its key priorities is to increase the proportion of pupils gaining Level 6 at the end of Key Stage 3, particularly in English.

In lessons seen, pupils made at least satisfactory progress and many made good progress in their learning because of the good teaching they received.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- raise standards of achievement, especially in Years 7 to 9 and in mathematics across the school – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Since the last inspection attendance has improved due to rigorous work by the college so that it is satisfactory overall. Further work is planned with Years 8 and 11, whose attendance has not yet improved. Behaviour and attitudes to learning have also improved due to a variety of initiatives that have been introduced. Parents are now able to be more involved in their children's learning through parent days and there has been an increase in the number of reward systems for good behaviour, attendance and achievement. Good behaviour was seen during the inspection. The PSHE programme continues to provide well for pupils' spiritual, moral and social education and is working towards improving their knowledge of other cultures. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through improved diet and encouragement in sport activities. Citizenship lessons and the range of vocational courses prepare them well for later life. Good use is made of outside agencies for appropriate subjects. Students say that they feel safe in school and that bullying is rare. Older pupils are given the opportunity to take on responsibilities for example acting as buddies to Y7 pupils through Senior Pupil roles. A programme of team building and leadership skills courses has recently been introduced which has been very popular and through which it is hoped that students will be motivated to take more responsibility.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve rates of attendance and pupils' attitudes towards learning – good progress

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was better than that noted at the last inspection. A high proportion of good teaching was seen. The college has recognised the need to monitor teaching and learning consistently and accurately and has provided good training for senior teachers in how to do this effectively. Thorough monitoring of lessons and constructive feedback to teachers has resulted in a noticeable improvement in teaching and in students' learning. Good individual support has been given to weaker teachers and relevant training in lesson planning, structure and assessment for learning has helped all staff to produce lessons which engage students' interest and better meet their needs.

In the best lessons teaching is knowledgeable, lively and challenging so all students are actively engaged in their own learning and make good progress. Teachers make good use of electronic whiteboards to display a range of resources which capture students' interest so they concentrate well and work hard. Teaching is closely tailored to examination and test requirements and learning is checked regularly so students know how well they are doing and how to improve their work. In these lessons students behave well and have good attitudes to learning. In some lessons the pace of learning is slower because teaching is less varied and challenging and students are less actively engaged in their learning.

Senior leaders now know the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in the college well and there is good capacity for further improvement. The planned training for subject leaders will ensure that monitoring of teaching and learning is even more widespread and becomes further embedded in the routine planning, self-evaluation and improvement cycle of the school. This will help good practice to be shared further in order to raise standards and achievement.

Good use is made of prior attainment and assessment information to set targets for students and to plan their future learning.

The curriculum has many strengths. Specialist Arts College status continues to have a positive impact and the provision for creative arts is good throughout the college. The differing pathways offered at age 14 provide a good range of academic and vocational courses which meet students' needs well. Provision of work related courses prepare students well for future employment. Students enjoy the wide range of extra curricular activities provided, especially in the arts and sport. The college works closely with external partners to provide good opportunities for students to develop their interests in music. The college does not meet the statutory requirement to provide all students in Year 9 with the opportunity to study a modern foreign language but has made the decision to offer alternative courses aimed at improving students' basic literacy skills.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and in mathematics – good progress

- identify and improve weaknesses in teaching and learning more quickly – good progress

Care, guidance and support for students continues to be good. There is a strong pastoral system based on houses which provides good support both academically and personally. The behavioural support unit continues to provide a haven for those who need time out from mainstream school and is a contributing factor towards the improvement in attendance and attitudes to learning. The number of exclusions has also been reduced. Students receive good guidance regarding their academic achievement and are aware of their progress and targets for improvement. They are well prepared for later life through good careers guidance, work experience, vocational courses and comprehensive personal and social education programme. Health and safety and child protection arrangements are all in place.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders, all staff and governors work well together and are fully committed to removing the causes of serious weaknesses and continually improve the education provided for its students.

At the time of the last inspection, the college's self-evaluation systems and use of data for tracking pupil progress was not fully embedded and therefore lacked rigour and consistency. Significant progress has been made in this area. All aspects of the college's work are subject to detailed monitoring and evaluation. Senior managers, learning leaders and all teachers are held to account for the progress of their students, leading to a strong shared responsibility for improving standards and achievement. Assessment data is analysed in order to identify any underachievement and action is taken to remedy this, for instance in the organisation of curriculum, teaching groups and intervention programmes. This data is also used to identify potential concerns regarding the quality of teaching in individual subjects or classes. Senior leaders' detailed and accurate evaluations of teaching and learning inform the process. Professional development in the form of training, coaching or general support is offered as a result. Middle managers, or learning leaders, are now to be included in the training for lesson observations.

Responsibility for overseeing each section of the college's post-Ofsted action plan has been given to a designated member of the Senior Leadership Team, and progress is regularly reviewed. Two newly-formed committees of the governing body are to take responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of the college's progress towards its targets, and their first meeting is due to take place before the end of term. Governors are involved in the life of the college, are well informed and hold senior managers to account for its progress.

The college's specialist status for visual and performing arts goes from strength to strength and continues to have a positive effect in raising standards in art and design, drama and expressive arts. The college has a deservedly good reputation in this area, and has successfully established projects involving the community and benefiting pupils in partner secondary schools and local primaries. The department is

led with energy and enthusiasm, and a commitment to providing the best possible opportunities for students to experience success in the visual and performing arts. Learning leaders now identify opportunities for the college specialism to contribute to their subject areas to enhance teaching and learning, making good use of visiting artists, actors, designers, writers and musicians, for instance. When the English department identified an issue in pupils' understanding of Shakespeare, a community arts project was set up. This aims to raise achievement in English at Key Stages 3 and 4, through workshops and performances of Shakespeare plays, including a residential weekend for targeted Year 9 students.

The school has good capacity for further improvement.

External support

The LA's Statement of Action is satisfactory and focused on the priorities identified at the time of the last inspection. Support has been provided in the form of additional visits from adviser and subject consultants, working alongside senior staff and subject learning leaders, particularly in English and mathematics. Where the college found that additional expertise was required in developing the accurate evaluation and development of the quality of teaching, the services of an external specialist were deployed. The LA supports this by making a contribution to consultancy fees. The positive impact of this range of support can be seen in the improved profile of the quality of teaching and learning across the college.

Main Judgements

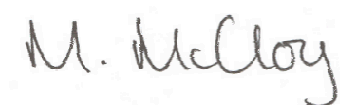
The school has made good progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- train middle leaders in the skills of lesson observation to secure further improvement in teaching and learning
- improve students' literacy skills in order to raise standards and achievement across all subject areas

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Redcar and Cleveland.

Yours sincerely



Marguerite McCloy
H M Inspector