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Dear Ms Stonier

SCHOOLS WHERE THE PUPILS' BEHAVIOUR HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A CONCERN BY INSPECTION: MONITORING INSPECTION OF RINGMER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheena MacDonald HMI and Selwyn Ward, additional inspector, to your college on 21 and 22 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection as part of the programme of visits to schools where the pupils' behaviour has been identified as a concern by inspection.

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 college's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the principal, senior leaders, members of staff, Connexions adviser, ecology coordinator, groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority, and the chair of governors.

Context

Ringmer is a popular comprehensive community college of average size that has specialist technology school status. There are similar numbers of boys and girls. Around 60% of students travel to college by bus from a dispersed rural area and from towns up to 20 miles away. Pupils' attainment on entry varies from year to year

but is average overall. The percentage of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is low at just over 3%. A £1,500,000 building programme has recently been completed and the college has been recognised as an Investor in People.

Achievement and standards

Ringmer has been identified by the Department for Education and Skills and the Specialist Schools Trust as a high performing school based on GCSE results over the past few years. The pupils start in Year 7 with average standards and most make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 9. However, the college was disappointed that the challenging Year 9 targets for 2005 were not met. Older pupils make good progress. The percentage gaining five or more higher GCSE grades was above average in 2004 but fell slightly in 2005. There are one or two subjects such as physical education and geography where results need to be more consistent each year. Progress in lessons was good, particularly when the teaching was lively and the lessons interesting.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour show a marked improvement to that described in the inspection report of November 2004. Pupils behave well at break times and as they move between lessons. The college has effective systems in place for dealing with any incidents of unacceptable behaviour in lessons so that pupils who misbehave are not allowed to disrupt the learning of others. Generally, pupils display positive attitudes and are willing to learn, although their enthusiasm varies between subjects and in relation to the quality of teaching. Where pupils are set challenging work that is well matched to their abilities they work with sustained effort and make good progress. Where the pace of lessons is more pedestrian pupils are sometimes quietly inattentive or chatter. In a number of lessons pupils have a tendency to call out rather than follow the more usual routine of putting up their hands to ask a question or volunteer an answer. Pupils themselves identify inconsistencies between how teachers manage behaviour as a key area that they would like to see improved.

Year 7 pupils appreciate the support they receive from older pupils and said that, "It makes you feel good about yourself."

The number of exclusions is slightly down on last year. Significantly, the reasons for exclusion have changed. Previously, a high number of exclusions were for acts of physical aggression. Exclusions now are more commonly for verbal abuse. This suggests both an improvement in behaviour and less tolerance by the college of unacceptable attitudes and extremes of behaviour.

Attendance is good and there are clear systems for tracking and following up absences which are applied systematically and effectively. Punctuality has improved significantly since the previous inspection and the number of pupils arriving late to registration at the beginning of the day or immediately after lunch has decreased by two thirds.

Most pupils were keen to get to lessons and a good staff presence in the corridors encouraged the less enthusiastic to be prompt. Staff have benefited from training in dealing with incidents of lateness and there are clear systems in place to log incidents and track individual pupil concerns.

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

- improve attitudes and behaviour, both in lessons and around the college – good progress.

Quality of provision

There are good systems for assessment. In the most effective lessons teachers use assessment information to ensure that work is well matched to pupils' abilities. The college makes good use of test data to set pupils challenging targets and there are strong mentoring arrangements to support pupils identified as being at risk of underachieving. Pupils have a good understanding of how well they are doing in each subject and of what they need to focus on in order to improve. The very effective guidance and support provided to pupils makes a significant contribution to their achievement.

The college has been imaginative in developing good alternatives for pupils for whom academic GCSE courses offer little appeal. An expanding range of vocational courses is being offered in conjunction with other schools and institutions and some pupils undertake work placements for part of the week.

Pupils are happy with arrangements to tackle bullying. They are pleased that teachers follow up incidents, particularly involving threatening behaviour, but are less confident that enough is done to discourage girls from making hurtful remarks.

There are strong links across the work of the college designed to improve the access of all pupils to the full curriculum. Levels of additional support are carefully planned and the monitoring and tracking of pupils ensures that support is well targeted to individual and group needs. In lessons the teaching assistants were providing good support, both for individual pupils and for groups of pupils. Their work was well focused on the pupils' learning and supported the implementation of the college's behaviour policy. However, the college has identified matching tasks to pupils' needs and prior attainment within the mainstream subject teaching as an area for further development.

Leadership and management

The college is well led and efficiently managed. The college analyses data well, rightly looking to see whether strategies to improve pupils' progress are working. Changes clearly follow from this evaluation, such as how English is taught in Year 7.

The senior leadership team has addressed improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour by developing a leadership model which makes all staff responsible for challenging inappropriate behaviour and fostering good behaviour. In addition continuing professional development has several strands and addresses both the needs of the institution and those of the individual. This model has been chosen as a case study of good practice by the Teacher Development Agency. All staff are included. Peer mentoring and coaching is also used to help staff develop and this is proving effective in improving the quality of teaching. The college has put in place systems and procedures which record and track the incidence of inappropriate behaviour. However, senior leaders recognise that these systems do not sufficiently recognise good conduct.

The actions taken have had a positive impact on improving behaviour but there remain some inconsistencies in how individual teachers interpret and implement the college behaviour policy.

The specialist status of the college has had a positive impact on improving behaviour. The work of advanced skills teachers in science and mathematics and the use of interactive whiteboards have helped improve the quality of teaching and learning. Strong partnerships have been developed with local primary schools and the local community. A broadening of the curriculum to include more vocational pathways, particularly with a rural dimension, is meeting the pupils' needs and interests. The college has a clear focus on environmental issues which are developed through several curriculum areas.

Governors support the college and are developing their role of critical friend. They take a close interest in the day to day working of the college and have a nominated governor who monitors the actions taken to improve behaviour.

External support

The local authority has provided well planned support which the college has used effectively to bring about improvements and identify areas for further development. The level of support has decreased due to the improvements already made and an increasing confidence in the ability of college staff to make further improvements.

In some subjects, for example religious education, consultants continue to provide additional support to improve the quality of middle management and teaching skills. The college has benefited from support from the Connexions partnership and this is appreciated by staff and pupils.

Main Judgements

The college has made good progress towards improving the pupils' behaviour.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers are consistent in their interpretation and application of the college's behaviour policy
- develop systems to track positive behaviour
- establish orderly routines and common expectations in lessons
- continue to develop the quality of teaching so that tasks are well matched to the pupils' needs and interests.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Chief Education Officer for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
H M Inspector