



23 March 2006

Mrs K Marshall
The Headteacher
The Ash Technology College
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Dear Mrs Marshall

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE ASH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Heather Yaxley HMI, George Rayner AI, John Evans AI and Alan Brewerton AI to your college on 8 and 9 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures in March 2005.

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Evidence

Inspectors observed 30 lessons across the college, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, a number of other senior staff, a group of students, the chair of governors, and a representative from the LA.

Context

Since the last visit, five teachers have left and four new ones have been appointed; despite strenuous efforts, a head of music has not been appointed. The college has 800 students on roll and has specialist technology status; it recently retained its IIP status. A curriculum review is being undertaken in the area.

Achievement and standards

Standards at Key Stage 3 and GCSE are low. Test results in mathematics and science were both well below the national average. At GCSE, the average point score was low, though a reasonable percentage of students attained 5 or more graded results; results in science were exceptionally low with too few students getting a pass or a higher grade. Overall, a quarter of students attained 5 or more higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics.

In 2005, progress during Key Stage 3 was satisfactory in English but not in mathematics and science: very few students attained the higher levels in the science tests. Progress in Key Stage 4 was inadequate, and exceptionally low for many groups including girls, higher attaining students, and students with statements of need. A more thorough analysis needs to be undertaken by the college of its 2005 results in order to enhance progress more systematically.

The college has current targets of 42.9% to gain 5+ higher grades at GCSE and 78.8%, 71.8%, 63.5%, 68.8% to attain Level 5 in the Key Stage 3 tests in English, mathematics, science, and ICT respectively. Internal data and analysis are not sufficiently robust to indicate whether good progress is being made by students. For example, the college recognises that performance in mock examinations by Year 11 students at GCSE in December was particularly low. A number of actions are being undertaken to improve achievement in Year 11, including regular monitoring, targeted support and a repeat of the mock examinations at the end of the spring term.

Progress in lessons observed was better than in the previous monitoring visit; it was good in a quarter of lessons and inadequate in a fifth of lessons. Assessment information held by teachers showed students' prior attainment with a few gaps, but information was not always available to show the progress made by students over time. There were examples of very good progress in textiles, with detailed records and specific targets to show students how to achieve well. There were also examples of students who achieved Level 5 in KS3 tests, yet had a minimum target level of grade E, which indicates very modest progress.

With regards to the key issue, there is limited evidence to show improvement in standards, though there are some signs of improvement in science. In terms of further improvement the college has begun to implement a scrutiny of work in order to enhance the quantity and quality of work completed by

students in each lesson; this has had some impact initially but a more targeted approach is now required in cases where weaknesses are identified. The college has also recognised that the requirement for a major piece of work each half term needs a more flexible approach with regards to subjects with a practical focus or those with limited curriculum time.

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

- Urgently raise standards in science, music and religious education - inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development is satisfactory and has improved since the last monitoring visit. Attitudes were good in half the lessons seen and inadequate in four of the thirty lessons observed. In the good lessons, students responded enthusiastically to questions and instructions, and settled quickly to the tasks set for them.

In lessons where attitudes were satisfactory, students' self confidence and belief in their capacity to do well were boosted by the encouragement given by teachers. Where attitudes were inadequate, students were disinterested and worked at a slow pace; occasionally this resulted in inappropriate and disruptive behaviour.

Behaviour in lessons, at break times, in corridors and in the canteen is satisfactory. Students, staff, and LA visitors are unanimous in their view that behaviour has improved. Strategies for managing behaviour are used with greater consistency across the college. Students have an understanding of what is expected of them and welcome the shift in emphasis away from sanctions and towards rewards. They are courteous to staff and visitors. Many engage cheerfully in conversations about their work and share their views of life at college.

Following the implementation of new strategies and procedures for managing inappropriate behaviour, the number of exclusions rose initially. In the spring term this trend has been halted in respect of temporary exclusions. Nevertheless, the number of exclusions remains high. The internal exclusion room is being used to reduce formal exclusions.

Students reported their concerns to inspectors that some bullying still occurs. A college survey, which requires more careful analysis, confirms that this is the case. There are new initiatives to address bullying including drop-in

sessions and a post box where concerns could be registered and collated; reference was made to these initiatives in an assembly.

Attendance on two days during the week of the inspection was well below 90%; attendance fell to 82% in the lessons seen, partly because of internal exclusions and inaccurate class lists. It is a cause for concern that some lists are inaccurate and some teachers are not always aware of students who have been temporarily excluded.

The college has a course in citizenship which includes a number of themes to promote students awareness of national and global issues, as well as drugs, sexual health and personal safety. Extra-curricular activities are adding successfully to the students' experiences in the curriculum. Enterprise education is part of the curriculum in Year 11.

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

- Review the behaviour policy, with students, and make sure all teachers apply it consistently - satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

The teaching in lessons was satisfactory or better in 24 out of 30 lessons observed. There were twelve lessons where teaching was judged to be good and one which was outstanding. The proportion of good lessons is higher than on the last monitoring visit, but not than in the full inspection a year ago.

The good lessons were effectively planned and were successful because they consisted of several purposeful activities, which retained the interest and motivation of students, with variety and pace. Teachers expressed high expectations of what they expected from students and gave clear guidance on how students needed to go about their work. Students usually responded well by working with effort and commitment and made steady progress.

In the inadequate lessons, activities did not engage the students. They were not always clear about what they had to do. Some activities went on for too long, so that concentration and pace of learning diminished. Rather than setting out their expectations at the start, teachers tended to admonish students at the end of activities, for not having produced enough good quality work.

Disruptive behaviour had less impact on learning than during the last visit. In a few lessons however, some students showed reluctance to work. Usually teachers acted promptly, energetically and skilfully to encourage them to improve.

Teachers had lesson plans, which described the intended activities clearly. Most identified intended learning outcomes, although this was not as comprehensive as it could be. In some lessons, the plans indicated the knowledge that would be gained but did not identify the skills that would underpin this. In a few cases, lessons did not follow plans, so that important activities such as discussions or self evaluation during closing summaries were omitted.

The college is continuing to endeavour to improve teaching. There is a systematic procedure to provide regular monitoring of the lessons of all teachers and to give feedback on how to improve.

Improvement in the provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory. Students benefit from well targeted and effective individual support in many lessons. However, teaching assistants occasionally do not contribute sufficiently to the learning of the students they are there to help. A more systematic analysis and evaluation of students' progress would help to indicate the impact of special needs support on students' learning.

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

- Ensure that all students with special educational needs get the support they need: satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

There have been some improvements in the action plan to address issues highlighted in the previous monitoring report. The timescale for activities is more specific and completion dates are more realistic. Whilst the college's specialist technology status has yet to have a positive impact upon achievement and the quality of teaching, there have been improvements in the provision for ICT within the college and in the community.

Since the last monitoring visit training has been undertaken on the use of 'corrective' language to modify pupils' behaviour. This has had a positive

impact on students' behaviour. More specialist teachers have been appointed in order to improve the quality of teaching.

However, the senior management team has not produced a review of the college's performance in a self-evaluation document. The information in the PANDA has not been analysed to evaluate performance and to report progress to the governing body. There is limited forward planning, for example, for students with learning difficulties; longer term strategic and financial planning would enhance the college's capacity for further improvement.

The governors are not aware of current performance in achievement and standards. They have not participated in evaluation of the college's performance, for example by the production of a self evaluation form (SEF). Hence, although they are involved in monitoring curriculum areas, they are not in a position to ask searching questions about the progress made by students.

Good progress has been made in the use of ICT and statutory requirements have been met in control technology. Statutory requirements are not met in the daily act of collective worship.

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

- Persevere with all efforts to appoint heads of departments for science, music and religious education and to appoint enough qualified, specialist teachers to match the curriculum - satisfactory progress
- Ensure that statutory requirements are met in the daily act of collective worship, control technology and more use of ICT in all subjects by students in Year 10 and 11- good progress on ICT and control technology, where statutory requirements are met; inadequate progress on collective worship.

External support

The local authority offers good support in the provision of consultants and of additional finance. Consultants have a satisfactory grasp of the college's strengths and weaknesses and there is a commitment to removing the college from special measures. A substantial amount of extra finance has been provided for the college to utilise, in addition to extra support from

consultants. The college needs to be more systematic in evaluating the impact of the use of the extra finance and more receptive to the advice provided.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate progress.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory progress.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in English, mathematics, ICT and modern foreign languages.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards by setting higher expectations of students' progress.
- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning by improving the quantity and quality of work completed by students in each lesson.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Executive Director for Children and Young People for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

R Kapadia
H M Inspector