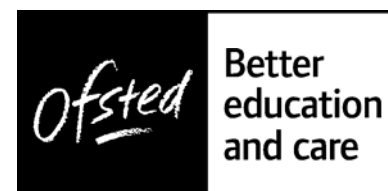


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Mr L Harris
Headteacher
Blakewater College
Shadsworth Road
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BB1 2HT

30 June 2006

Dear Mr Harris,

FRESH START: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BLAKEWATER COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit to your college on 28 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the college opened in April 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 the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) scrutinised documents and held discussions with the headteacher, senior staff and a representative from the local authority (LA). The college's work was not widely observed on this visit as most students were not present due to an induction day taking place for new Year 7 pupils entering the college in September.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in March 2006, a new member of staff has joined the senior management team, and a further appointment to this team has been made to take effect from September. This will also fill the vacancy for a teacher of religious education. Staffing remains stable, as does the projected number of students on roll for September, at around 550.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the college are well below average overall, particularly in literacy skills. Students make at least satisfactory progress, and recent improvements in their rates of progress are now being seen in test results which show that achievement is good for a significant proportion of students. At the time of the visit the college had received confirmation of Key Stage 3 results in mathematics which showed that more than half of the Year 9 students attained at or above the standard expected of that age group. This represents good progress for those students and a considerable improvement on the college's 2005 results. The college's efforts to spread accreditation for some subjects across Years 10 and 11 are paying dividends, and half of Year 10 students have already completed at least two GCSEs. Based on current predictions as a result of teacher assessment and course work, the college is now expecting to exceed its own challenging targets for the proportion of Year 11 students achieving five or more good grades at GCSE.

Personal development and well-being

The college has continued to develop innovative strategies for encouraging and monitoring students' punctuality and attendance. This has led to improved overall levels of punctuality as students respond to the high expectations and know that late arrival is always followed up. Despite attendance levels remaining well below the national average, it is improving slowly. At 88%, attendance has improved from 83% seen at the time of the predecessor school. Fixed-term exclusions are being further reduced and the college's internal exclusion facilities continue to be utilised for a minority of students who present challenging behaviour. These facilities are being re-organised next term in line with strategies to reduce the proportion of students who re-offend.

A group of college council representatives who volunteered to come in and speak to the inspector reported very positive views on behalf of the majority of students. They appreciate that clear guidelines and expectations of behaviour in lessons are reinforced by staff so that students' rights to learn in a safe and supportive environment are met.

An increasing number of students are keen to become involved in the college council and take on responsibilities, and this is indicative of their improving attitudes to learning and college life in general. A group of students recently received an award after initiating a project to improve the college's outside environment. The college magazine includes an increasing number of articles written by students, and the intention is that in the near future it will be completely managed and edited by students themselves. A group of students worked on a presentation on the theme of bullying, and the resources they produced are to be used to support new Year 7 students next term.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- continue to use a wide range of positive strategies to motivate students and raise their self-esteem, leading to further improvement in attitudes, behaviour and attendance— good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has not been assessed through lesson observations during this visit. At the time of the last visit, teaching was good or better in two-thirds of lessons. The monitoring activities undertaken by the college's leadership team, assigned adviser and school improvement partner indicate that this continues to be the case although these judgements could not be moderated during this inspection. However, based on assessment information provided by the college, students' learning is often good and many are making more rapid progress than was the case when the college first opened.

The college continues to explore innovative amendments to its curriculum in order to maximise the benefits for individual students. Staff have taken on board with enthusiasm the college's initiatives aimed at improving students' general literacy skills across all subjects. The college has prepared well for this through professional development activities and sharing of expertise. Individual departments now have a clearer view of how literacy skills can be developed through their particular subject, and curriculum plans are reflecting this.

Good progress is being made in the development of consistent assessment and target-setting processes to improve academic guidance for students. During a newly-introduced review day, many students had the opportunity to discuss their achievements and targets with their parents and a learning co-ordinator. Staff are beginning to make use of electronic systems to record and track the progress of individuals and groups of students, although this is still developing. Termly learning review reports provide information for students and their parents about what needs to be done to improve achievement in subjects.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- implement planned developments in the English curriculum so that students have more opportunities to improve their literacy and communication skills across all subjects— good progress.

Leadership and management

The college benefits from strong and effective leadership and management. It has utilised additional funds well to further increase the capacity for improvement, for example by increasing the staffing complement and range of expertise at leadership level and by developing the skills of all senior and middle leaders. A striking feature of the college is the positive commitment of all staff and the way in which they embrace with enthusiasm the opportunities to improve the life chances of their students by ensuring that they have every possible chance to achieve well.

The groundwork for whole-college policies in assessment and marking has been set through consultation, auditing of current practice and drafting of policies which are to be fully implemented in the autumn term. Since the last monitoring visit, a considerable number of staff development activities have taken place to build on teachers' skills in the use of assessment for learning. There are clear strategies to incorporate this into day to day planning, teaching and marking in order to increase students' own awareness of their achievements and specific areas for improvement.

The headteacher sets a clear direction for the college with an unrelenting focus on improving achievement at all levels, and his vision is shared by staff and governors. Careful consideration is given to staff development and recruitment to ensure that capacity for improvement remains strong and developments are sustainable. The college has good quality action plans for improvement and these are being revisited in preparation for the next academic year. It has rightly focused on short-term priorities so far, and is now looking to incorporate some longer term planning as existing developments become more secure. Senior leaders have a clear view of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. They are developing processes by which the college can provide evaluative evidence of the impact of its actions on the achievement and personal development of students.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- firmly establish the use of attainment data and assessment systems, including a whole-college marking policy, to measure progress and set targets, ensuring that these are consistently shared with students and lead to improved achievement – good progress.

External support

The LA supports the college through regular monitoring and evaluation of its work by its school improvement officer. Collaboration with the college's School Improvement Partner (SIP) continues and their work is currently focusing on the use of assessment for learning strategies and the quality of the college's self evaluation. These priorities are appropriate and particularly relevant to the college's present stage of development.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress since opening in April 2005 is good.

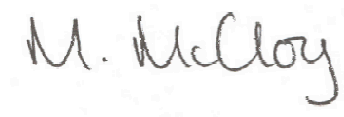
Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to use a wide range of positive strategies to motivate students and raise their self-esteem, leading to further improvement in attitudes, behaviour and attendance.

- Provide students with more frequent opportunities to improve their literacy and communication skills across all subjects.
- Firmly establish the use of attainment data and assessment systems, including a whole-college marking policy, to measure progress and set targets, ensuring that these are consistently shared with students and lead to improved achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Lifelong Learning in Blackburn.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. McCloy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'M' and 'y'.

Marguerite McCloy
H M Inspector