

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
360 Lee Valley Technopark
Ashley Road
London
N17 9LN

Ofsted helpline
T 0845 123 6001 08456 404045
F 0845 123 6002 edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Mr M Longden
Headteacher
Applemore College
Dibden Purlieu
Southampton, SO45 4RQ

15 June 2006

Dear Mr Longden

OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WITH A NOTICE TO IMPROVE

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and governors offered me when I visited the college on 14 June. I much appreciated your professional and personal welcome and particularly would like to thank the students who shared their views so freely.

Having considered carefully all the evidence presented,, both from the college and the local authority (LA), I can report that Applemore is making good progress overall against the issues identified in the last inspection.

As a result of its inspection in October 2005 the college was asked to address five aspects of its leadership and management: producing a recovery plan; improving how students and parents were consulted; self-evaluation; sixth form provision; and underachievement in Key Stage 4.

The well designed and managed recovery plan is having a significant effect on reducing the large budget deficit. The headteacher, governors, finance officer and the LA are working well together to minimise the impact that less money could have on provision. Greater efficiencies are being achieved as a result of a successful curriculum review, the change to a weekly timetable, and a reduction in the number of GCSEs for which students are entered. Staff restructuring and greater clarity of the responsibilities of senior and middle managers have produced savings and improved accountability. Despite financial constraints, students say that resources have been improved with better books, more readily available stock, and enhanced information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

Progress in including students, parents and other partners in decision making has been good. Although students would like to have an even greater influence, they make their views known through year and school councils. Regular surveys of student and parental opinions are carefully considered by the school. Students say that staff, and the headteacher in particular, listen to them and 'something gets done'. Governors are proud that the school is a much more open place with more regular consultation meetings for parents

not only to discuss pupils' progress, but to debate wider school issues such as the future of the sixth form. They do not underestimate the outstanding contribution of the head in leading the communication process!

There has been outstanding progress in improving self-evaluation and in creating action plans. This work is securely underpinning the school's improvement. The record of where the school came from, and how it is being moved forward, is well documented and reflects strongly the commitment of the leadership team and the head and deputy headteacher in particular. Contributions from all departments are well collated and used to plan the way forward. For example, involving all departments in this way has led to a common system of the assessment of students' work to show how it could be improved. As a result everyone's understanding of how target setting can raise standards is improving fast.

The college has begun the process that will result in the closure of its sixth form and there are no A level students presently attending in Year 12. In the interim period since the last report satisfactory progress was made in restructuring the sixth form curriculum and ensuring students got the support they needed. However, as in last year, some students failed to complete courses. The college has done well to forge links with local sixth form providers to make sure that students wishing to take A levels can do so.

Satisfactory progress is underway to overcome the underachievement identified by the last report in Key Stage 4. All departments have this as a priority in their planning and improved challenge for the groups of pupils who underachieve has been a feature of professional development for teachers. The college predicts better results this year with English expected to be the most successful subject. Predictions for A* to C overall passes at GCSE point to targets still not being met, but new initiatives are likely to take more time than the eight months since the last inspection to have substantial impact.

The college has received good support from the LA notably since an appendix to its original statement of action focused on the areas negotiated with the headteacher. The measures have been successfully integrated into the college's planning, as for example to improve internal review.

Although more still needs to be done, I am pleased to report that the college is moving in the right direction.

Yours sincerely

Mike Burghart
(Lead Inspector)