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24 November 2006

Mrs Krys Marshall  
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Dear Mrs Marshall

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE ASH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

### Introduction

Following my visit with Pamela Fearnley, Additional Inspector, and Brian Evans, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 November 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in February 2005.

This letter will be posted 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

Inspectors observed 20 lessons across a few departments in the college, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher and a number of senior managers, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority (LA)

### Context

Since the last visit, nine teachers have left and seven, including some who are unqualified, have been appointed. There are 715 students on roll, including 105 in Year 7.

## Achievement and standards

Test results at the end of year 9 have improved since 2005 in all the three core subjects; results at GCSE have been more variable. The college's targets for Key Stage 3 have been met. Test results in English were above the national average, with 80% of students obtaining Level 5. Progress from Key Stage 2 to 3 has improved, but progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 was exceptionally low.

Unvalidated data indicates that the attainment of Year 11 students in GCSE examinations in 2006 improved from 2005 but remains below average. The proportion of students obtaining five or more grades and the uncapped point score have both increased. The percentage of students who attained at least five higher grades, originally reported to be 35% has risen to 38% after appeals, which is still below the target of 43%. Results in mathematics and English both improved in 2006 with over half the students achieving a higher grade in one of these two core subjects. However, GCSE results in science decreased and only 20% of students achieved a higher grade.

Provisional data indicates that students' progress over the five years from Year 7 to Year 11 remains exceptionally low. The college has made a start on analysing examination data according to gender, special needs and cognitive abilities scores, but not prior attainment. Strategies have been devised to enable subjects to improve but these need to be more rigorous for the key subjects where there has been significant under-performance.

Progress in the lessons observed was not as good as in the previous monitoring visit, it was good in 6 lessons, satisfactory in 8 lessons and inadequate in 6 lessons. Assessment information in the college is of variable quality but it is poor in science, which had predicted much better results. Moreover, the target grades are not sufficiently challenging. For example, there are a number of students who achieved Level 5 in science Key Stage 3 tests with a target level of grade E at GCSE. The college has rightly identified the need to review the target setting process to ensure challenging targets are set.

There is evidence of some improvement in the progress made by students in science by the end of Year 9 but not by the end of Year 11. The college was not able to provide evidence to show that improvements have been made in religious education and music.

The college recognises that the targets which were set initially for 2007 are low and often lower than the results obtained in 2006. New targets have

been produced which need further review to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging, yet realistic.

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

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

### Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development and well being are satisfactory. Students' attitudes were good in many of the lessons. In one lesson, where the attitudes were outstanding, they concentrated very well on designing a note-pad holder.

In the good lessons students also worked with good concentration and responded positively to the tasks set. In three inadequate lessons students did not engage well and behaviour sometimes deteriorated; in several cases this was because the work was not well matched to their needs.

Behaviour in the school is generally good. Most teachers use the sanctions policy effectively to manage behaviour, but there were also instances where it was not used as designed. More work is needed in order to sustain the improvements in management of behaviour, particularly as there are a number of new teachers in the school.

The college produced useful information on the rate of exclusions in 2005/06, compared to the previous year. A similar number of students were subject to fixed term or permanent exclusions in both years; the total number of days of exclusion reduced slightly. A more detailed analysis is planned to compare figures for each term. The current picture for the first half of the autumn term in 2006 shows a marked reduction in exclusions.

Attendance is low and with a provisional figure of 88.9% last year. In the lessons observed the attendance was 85.9% and only one lesson had all the students in the class. This remains an area of concern. The college is working with the education, welfare, inclusion and achievement team; it would be helpful to evaluate the impact of this partnership early in the spring term, with regards to overall attendance as well as in lessons.

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

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

### Quality of provision

This visit focused specifically on science which was cited as an area of weakness in the inspection report of February 2005, though lessons were also seen in several other subjects. Five of the 20 lessons seen were good, nine were satisfactory and six were inadequate. The lessons seen on this visit are not representative of the teaching in the school as a whole. However, the impact of teaching and learning on progress and students' overall achievement, despite strengths in some areas of the curriculum, is inadequate.

There is wide variation in the quality of teaching. In good lessons, teachers use assessment data well to plan well-constructed lessons which they conclude with an evaluation which shows a strong awareness of how students learn. Their teaching demonstrates their skill in enabling students to play an active role in their own learning. In the higher-achieving departments such as mathematics and English, successful teaching is further underpinned by consistently high expectations by staff. This is combined with a firm focus on students' progress, with actions taken when necessary. Careful attention by the teacher to important details such as types of calculator led to good progress on compound interest by a middle attaining group in a lesson in mathematics. In an English lesson, the teacher deliberately asked students to sit in mixed gender pairs and enabled good progress to be made on speaking and listening skills when comparing Cinderella and Pygmalion as plays.

In satisfactory lessons adequate planning generates positive attitudes to learning. However, learning outcomes are perceived as doing tasks, such as the completion of a chart, which does not develop an understanding the underlying processes.

The proportion of inadequate lessons is too high. Typically, teachers in these lessons have poor classroom management skills and do not deal with disruptive behaviour consistently. Planning is not pitched to meet the needs of learners: in one class work was too easy, in another it was too challenging in relation to students' prior attainment.

The college has set out a good in-service programme to give teachers opportunities to extend their teaching and learning skills. Senior management has also established appropriate procedures for regularly monitoring and

supporting classroom performance. The college's judgement on classroom performance, undertaken in the summer term, bears a reasonable match to those of this inspection. However the college's proportion of satisfactory lessons from the summer term presents an unduly optimistic picture; evidence from the LA is more adverse. The college has yet to collate its own evidence on the quality of teaching relating to the autumn term; it would be helpful if this was also done by the LA.

## Leadership and management

Since the last monitoring visit, improvements in various areas such as behaviour management have been maintained. There have been significant improvements in GCSE results in English and mathematics. This shows that the college has some capacity to improve. However, overall performance at GCSE continues to show inadequate progress. This is mainly because of the under-performance of some departments, notably science, which was noted as a key area for urgent attention in the inspection report of February 2005.

Some curricular changes have been made to provision in Key Stage 4, but improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in science and religious education have yet to be realised. These two subjects remain as areas of concern, as does attendance. Statutory requirements have yet to be met with regards to collective worship.

The college has a detailed post-Ofsted action plan and additions have been made in July, forming a document which is now unwieldy. The college notes that almost all of the actions have been completed; yet some key success indicators have not been met. There is a need for clear written documentation which can be readily understood and implemented, including a rigorous analysis of impact.

The college does have areas of strength such as English and mathematics but it does not analyse the strategies they use and disseminate the findings to under-performing departments.

Some forward planning for short-term improvements has taken place, but strategic and financial planning for the longer term continues to require urgent consideration, a point made in the last monitoring visit. Planning is also needed to adapt to falling rolls in the local area, which will increase the financial pressure, unless there is increased funding.

A large deficit was accrued in 2005-06 which had not been anticipated by the governing body. A recovery plan has just been put in place. However, the latest monthly return shows that the planned reduction in deficit is unlikely to

be met. Since the duty of providing a balanced budget is not being met, governance is inadequate.

The college has specialist status in technology; it has had some impact on raising achievement in science at Key Stage 3, but not at Key Stage 4. The college has been advised about the removal from this status from January 2007.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 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
- and, to meet statutory requirements:
- Introduce a daily act of collective worship, control technology and more use of ICT in all subjects and by students in Years 10 and 11 – good progress on ICT and control technology, where statutory requirements are met but inadequate progress on collective worship.

#### External support

The local authority has provided extensive support from a range of consultants, with varying degrees of impact and success. A consultant has been working in the college on a regular basis, as well as consultants from the National Strategies. A school improvement partner has also visited three times.

The consultant has enabled support to be provided in key areas such as behaviour management, the use of data, finance, and governance. Whilst there has been positive impact on improving behaviour, the impact on improving financial controls and governance has yet to be realised. The total amount of extra direct funding to the college is not clear. Further training has been offered on financial management and an advanced skills governor has been appointed. Despite help from an external consultant, data are still not well used in the college: more attention needs to be paid to validity and accuracy. The consultants from the National Strategies have had limited impact with regards to improving provision in science and religious education.

A number of these issues have been recognised in useful reports from the school improvement partner, who has made a number of valuable suggestions, some of which await concerted action. The college and the LA need to evaluate the impact of external support in tackling the key issues.

## Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate

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.
- Document and implement more systematic long – term strategic and financial planning.

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