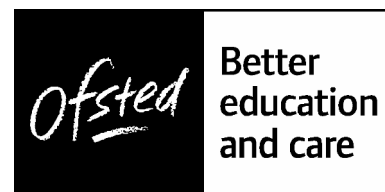


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26 October 2006

Mr Thompson
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Dear Mr Thompson

Ofsted survey programme – Evaluation of Reforming and Developing the Workforce

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit to Southam College on 18 and 19 October 2006 to evaluate the impact of reforming and developing the workforce

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of documentation, and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of reforming and developing the workforce in your school was judged to be outstanding.

Impact on standards and the outcomes of Every Child Matters

The impact of workforce reform on achievement and standards of different groups of pupils is outstanding.

- There is a strong focus in the school on raising the standards and achievement of all students.
- The impact of workforce reform on the achievement of students who have not achieved the national expectation in English and mathematics on entry to the school, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, is

outstanding. These students make rapid progress and gain a strong sense of achievement in English and mathematics because lessons are very well matched to their needs and successfully build both confidence and skills.

- Students interviewed during the visit feel safe, secure and happy at the school. They value the sporting activities available to them and are aware of the importance of a healthy diet, although workforce reform has not yet made an impact on this aspect of the school's provision. Attendance is good and has been aided by the appointment of an attendance co-ordinator.
- The behaviour observed during the visit was very good. In both lessons observed teachers demonstrated very effective classroom management skills and there was very good rapport between the students, teachers and teaching assistants.

Impact on the quality of teaching and learning

The impact of the strategy on the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- The very strong partnership between teachers and teaching assistants has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. In one of the lessons observed group work, supported by two teaching assistants, enabled students to make progress which would not otherwise have been possible. In the second, the presence of the teaching assistant enabled all students to meet the teachers' high expectations.
- Teaching assistants are deployed very effectively. They assist with the planning and teaching of lessons, assessment and target setting, and at consultation meetings with parents. Their involvement in these activities, and the good match between their skills and students' needs, contribute to the high quality of teaching and learning and the very good support the school provides for lower achieving students.
- The arrangement for teaching assistants to provide cover during teachers' absence is working well. This is reducing the disruption to learning and improving the continuity between lessons.

Impact on the quality of curriculum

The impact of the strategy on specific areas of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The school has successfully modified the curriculum to meet the needs of those students who have not reached Level 4 in English and/or mathematics. Much thought and attention has been given to the organisation and planning of the Additional English and mathematics

lessons and to the contribution of teaching assistants to these. All staff involved are highly committed to raising standards and the high quality of their work is resulting in very good provision for the students involved.

- The school has thoroughly evaluated the impact of the Additional English and mathematics programmes and used the outcomes to reshape and improve the provision. The success of the programmes is due in large part to the very strong commitment of those involved, including the co-ordinator for continuous professional development (CPD) and the head of mathematics, and the drive and determination of the head of the Learning Support Department.

Leadership and management of reforming and developing the workforce

Leadership and management of the strategy are outstanding.

- Senior leaders have a very good understanding of and commitment to the principles of workforce reform and development. They recognise the potential of an increasingly diverse workforce and give much attention to the recruitment and professional development of all staff.
- There are very clear line management arrangements for all staff. For instance, the head of the Learning Support Department, who is also a member of the college leadership team, has line management for the large team of teaching assistants and fulfils this responsibility very effectively.
- The staffing structure for teaching assistants is well designed to provide very good career development opportunities and progression in both responsibilities and pay.

Impact on training and managing a reformed workforce

- There is a strong commitment to develop an inclusive school and this is reflected in the common systems which exist for teaching staff and members of the wider workforce. For instance, there is a common approach to performance management with the annual reviews being informed by rigorous self-assessment based upon national standards.
- Similarly, the approach to training and development is inclusive of all staff. The CPD team has a prominent role in the school and draws upon the outcomes of performance management in shaping the school's training programme. Teaching assistants are given good support for the development of their expertise, including opportunities for degree level study and attendance on courses leading to national qualifications.

Impact on inclusion

The impact of the strategy on provision for inclusion is outstanding.

- The school's attention to the needs of the lower achieving students when they first enter the school is outstanding. There is close liaison with primary schools prior to students' entry in Year 7 and very good provision for those who have not reached the national expectation in English and mathematics or who have only just done so. The progress these students make is very carefully tracked. The good relationships between teachers and students in lessons, the high quality of the support students receive from teaching assistants and the very good teaching they experience, including the effective use of electronic aids, contribute to the outstanding progress they make during their time at the school.
- The head of the Learning Support Department makes an outstanding contribution to the development of the school's inclusive ethos. Her work is highly valued by the students and staff and her role given high status.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- strengthen the involvement of students in evaluating the impact of workforce changes on achievement and standards and the quality of provision
- identify and share the good practice which exists in the school in the ways in which teachers and teaching assistants work together in the classroom
- make more explicit within documentation the school's expectations of the working partnership between teachers and teaching assistants.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to reform and develop the school workforce.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour
Her Majesty's Inspector