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7 February 2007

Mr S. Harness  
Headteacher  
Woodham Community Technology College  
Washington Crescent  
Newton Aycliffe  
County Durham  
DL5 4AX

Dear Mr Harness,

**OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WHOSE OVERALL  
EFFECTIVENESS HAS BEEN JUDGED SATISFACTORY**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when John Paddick and I inspected your school on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. In particular, please pass on my thanks to the governor representative and those staff and students who gave their time to discuss matters with us.

As a result of the inspection on 24 and 25 January 2006 the college was asked to tackle four areas for improvement: ensure the sixth form curriculum meets the needs of all students in order to raise achievement and standards; take steps to increase the proportion of good teaching; intervene at an early stage to prevent students' from under-achieving and ensure that new systems for setting students' targets, assessing their work and monitoring their progress are implemented consistently across the college.

Having considered carefully all the evidence presented by the college, the local authority and from Ofsted data I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress overall and also in relation to the individual areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Since the inspection of January 2006 the college has introduced important changes to the roles and responsibilities of its senior and middle leaders. In particular, the appointment of a second deputy headteacher has strengthened the college's capacity to hold subject leaders directly to account for the performance of their departments and for tackling areas requiring improvement. These measures have been significant in addressing the issues identified in the inspection report.

The successful introduction of three study pathways to the sixth form curriculum has enabled students to access an appropriate range of vocational courses in addition to A-levels. These changes better meet students' needs than previously. In 2006 achievement and standards in the sixth form improved and they are now broadly average. Most students achieved in line with predictions. Those students interviewed spoke positively about their choice of courses and the help they received when making them. They know how well they are progressing because of the feedback they receive from staff and are supported well with respect to their future options.

The college's senior leaders have greatly improved procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. They understand where teaching is good and where further improvement is required. Well focused professional development is helping teachers to progress and opportunities to share good practice have high priority. The college's comprehensive records, confirmed by inspection evidence, show that teaching is improving although a small proportion of inadequate teaching remains. During the visit this occurred in a two lessons where teachers were unable to successfully manage those students who demonstrated poor behaviour.

Since the inspection of January 2006 the college has established robust and consistently applied procedures for tracking students' achievement. Detailed performance information now accurately identifies under-achieving departments and students. Targeted actions by senior staff and subject leaders to bring about improvement are incisive and well managed. Teachers increasingly use assessment information well to plan their lessons and set ambitious targets for their students. A larger number of students are now reaching these higher and more challenging targets because, in most cases, learning is more sharply focused on meeting their needs and this improves the progress which they make.

These actions are entirely appropriate but were not introduced early enough to affect all the college's 2006 examination results. Whilst the proportion of students achieving 5 or more A\* to C grades at GCSE increased to 54 per cent this reduces to 39 per cent when English and mathematics are included. Both results remain below national average. There was good improvement at Key Stage 3 in both mathematics and science at level 5 but not in English. In addition, too many more able students in English did not achieve in line with their capabilities and this remains a significant area to improve.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson  
Her Majesty's Inspector