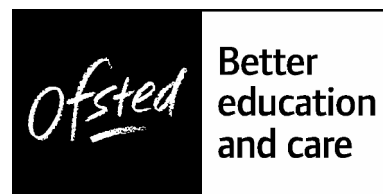


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06 November 2006

Mrs Yvonne Lee
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Dear Mrs Lee

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Attendance for Learning in Secondary Schools

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 November 2006 to look at your work in promoting attendance.

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, students and a representative from of the local authority, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and observation of two parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of your work in promoting attendance was judged to be good.

Achievement & standards

- Attendance has been improving year on year and at 92.6% for 2005/06 the school exceeded its attendance target; this is also marginally above the provisional national average for secondary schools. Unauthorised attendance has fluctuated although there was a significant drop between 2004/05 and 2005/06. Attendance for this term is currently 93% and is on track to meet the 2006/07 target.
- The achievements of the few students tracked on the inspection were satisfactory overall although for some they were good.

Quality of teaching and learning in relation to attendance

- The quality of teaching and learning in the few part lessons seen on this visit was of variable quality, ranging from outstanding to inadequate. In the best the students thoroughly enjoyed the lesson and were consequently engaged throughout. Verbal rewards were impressive and feedback given to students by the teacher helpfully guided their learning and raised their self esteem. Where teaching was weak this was due to ineffectual management of some students' misbehaviour.
- Students interviewed during the visit also reported a mixed picture of teaching quality, noting that some lessons were very engaging whilst others were much less so.
- The students interviewed had a good knowledge of their own attendance and report they are aware of the imperative the school is giving to attendance. They cite their form tutors as being significant in communicating these messages.

Quality of curriculum in relation to attendance

- The quality of the curriculum in supporting attendance is good.
- The school has responded well to the needs of the students by moving from a full GCSE programme to a much more flexible curriculum. The use of a local college and the school's own 'learning hub' as well as the introduction of more interesting courses has enabled the school to put together curriculum packages for students who do not engage best with the traditional curriculum.

Leadership and management of attendance

- Leadership and management in relation to attendance are good. Matters to do with attendance are being driven well by the senior member of staff responsible for attendance. Systems are clear and expectations explicit.
- The roles of most staff in terms of attendance have been made clear although subject leaders could be more engaged in matters of attendance.
- The school is developing its use of attendance data well. There are very helpful evaluations of individual students' attendance undertaken by the attendance lead. However, there could be more profitable analyses at a group and whole school level to determine patterns and trends for different groups of students.
- The school is linking attendance data and students' achievement effectively and is making good use of this in explaining its significance to students and parents.
- The school has recognised the need to be more proactive in helping students return from absence and promising work is taking place in through the 'Getting Back On Track' arrangements.

- There is a suitable range of strategies in place which enable the school to be both proactive and responsive when dealing with poor attendance. The school reports that the 'voice mail' system is appreciated by parents and has made a significant contribution in reducing unauthorised absence.
- The views of students are gathered in a variety of ways and are taken seriously by the school. Nevertheless, there is more the school could do to obtain and act on the views of some hard to reach students who feel their views are not represented.

Inclusion

- The provision for inclusion is good.
- The great majority of students interviewed were able to identify a member of staff who they felt took a particular interest in them and was someone to whom they could turn when in need.
- Through its data collection and other interpersonal strategies the school has a good knowledge of individual students with attendance problems.

Areas for improvement

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

- undertake further analysis of attendance data at a cohort and whole school level
- develop the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders in respect of attendance
- consider different ways of seeking the views of some hard to reach students.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your attendance work in the school.

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

Eric Craven
HM Inspector of Schools