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Mr Paul Williams
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Dear Mr Williams

Ofsted Survey Inspection Programme – The degree and effectiveness of parent and carer involvement in children and young people's education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, parents and students, during my visit on 18 January 2007 to look at the degree and effectiveness of parent and carer involvement in children's education.

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, parents and students and scrutiny of relevant documentation. The judgements are specifically in relation to the degree and effectiveness of parent and carer involvement under the following headings.

The overall effectiveness of the degree and effectiveness of parent and carer involvement in children's education was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards including personal development

The impact of parental and carer involvement on achievement, standards and personal development is outstanding.

- All groups of students, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity and learning difficulties or disabilities, make good progress. The school works very closely

with all students to ensure that they make the best progress possible and this is particularly valued by parents.

- The excellent induction arrangements ensure that the students settle into school well and quickly make progress. Parents are extremely appreciative of the very high expectations of the school. They know that this has a very positive impact on 'building their confidence and self-esteem and that of their children'.
- Parents are very well informed and involved at every step of their child's education and are kept abreast of all available courses and qualifications. They work closely with the school to prepare the students for the next stage of education and for their future economic well-being.
- The school works extremely effectively with the parents to promote the personal development and well-being of its students. As one parent explained in a letter to the school, 'I gave you a boy, and you have given me back a kind and thoughtful young man.'
- The very effective behaviour monitoring system is shared with parents and this helps them to work with the school to identify patterns of concern and strategies to manage the incidents.
- The school works very closely with the parents to maintain its good attendance levels. It is a notable reassurance to parents that their children enjoy coming to Shaftesbury High and are happy there.

Quality of teaching and learning including assessment, support and guidance

The impact of parent and carer involvement in these areas is outstanding.

- The outstanding relationships between staff and parents enables any concerns to be discussed frankly and openly, ensuring that there is a consistent approach to the students. Shared concerns are referred quickly to the wide range of outside agencies which are closely linked to the school. Parents are particularly appreciative of the regular telephone calls they receive from staff and their consistent availability for discussions.
- A home/school diary is used on a regular basis with students up to Year 11 and parents find this very helpful to find out what their child has been working on.
- The school provides an extremely comprehensive range of information about the students' progress during the academic year. There is an annual review meeting which is attended by 100% of the parents. There are also other regular progress meetings and open evenings where teachers discuss together with the students and their parents.

- In addition to this, every student is given an annual written report. The school has developed a new system for recording progress which breaks down learning into smaller steps. This enables the parents to have a clearer understanding of their children's progress.
- Parents particularly value the regular information they receive about what their children will be learning. They feel that the reinforcement of key words at home helps their children make consistent progress.
- The pastoral support and guidance provided by the school is considered by the parents to be of the highest quality. The highly experienced staff offer a wide range of counselling services to parents and pupils. This includes support for managing teenagers and medication issues.
- There is a small parent support group but some would find a more formalised system for parents to meet each other beneficial.

Quality of the curriculum

The impact of parental involvement on the quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- Parents feel extremely well informed about the curriculum through open evenings, newsletters, and occasional workshops.
- The curriculum is enhanced with the very close links with the neighbouring Hatch End secondary school. This is fully recognised by the parents who value their child's involvement in the full range of National Curriculum subjects, sporting events and drama productions. Older students benefit from weekly participation at local colleges.
- Parents fully endorse the importance of developing their children's independence within the community and work closely with the school to achieve this. The 'Travel Training' unit of work, which is an accredited award, enables the students to learn to travel independently and receive recognition for doing so.
- Parents highly value the residential experiences in Hereford and Wales and the opportunities for participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. They appreciate that these activities prepare their children for their future life and help them to develop a greater understanding of the wider world in which they live.
- At times, parents feel that there is a dilemma between the requirements of the national programmes of study and the need to prepare the students with very basic key life skills such as managing to live independently.

Leadership and management of parent and carer involvement

Leadership and management in relation to parental involvement are outstanding.

- The headteacher, deputy head and other senior staff are totally committed to working with parents and are highly effective in promoting this partnership. They are extremely well supported by all other teaching staff and specialist teams in school.
- Parent involvement in school is clearly prioritised in the school improvement plan. The recently submitted bid for the Specialist SEN College represents very well the value placed upon parental involvement.
- Parents are well represented on the governing body. Parent governors explain that homework has been discussed at great length and an individual approach has been maintained. Parents are generally in agreement with this approach.
- There is no formal parent and teacher association but a small group of parents regularly organise very popular and lucrative fund-raising activities.

Inclusion

The impact of parent and carer involvement on inclusion is outstanding.

- The achievement of all students, particularly their personal development and well-being, is outstanding. This is because teaching and learning takes into account the needs of each student in relation to their own learning targets and promotes personal development extremely well.
- Parents are particularly appreciative of the way that all their children are treated as individuals.
- The leadership and management of the school ensure that parents are fully involved in all aspects of school life.
- The students are exceptionally well supported by professionals who work very closely in partnership with the students and their parents to ensure the best outcomes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- devising a parent mentoring system so that parents can gain mutual support from each other
- considering ways of linking more closely the national requirements to the relevance of developing basic key life skills.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop parental involvement further in conjunction with raising attainment and improving outcomes for children.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Additional Inspector