

04 April 2007

Mr Andrew Jones  
Principal  
Sir John Deane's College  
Northwich  
Cheshire  
CW9 8AF

Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07  
Sector Skills Area 2: Science and mathematics post-16

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 21 March 2007. I am particularly grateful to you, managers and the teaching staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to other staff and learners who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in science. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. All college letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of learners' work and observation of seven lessons.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in the sciences and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

Learners' achievement

- Results are outstanding – retention and pass rates in biology, chemistry and physics are above the national averages. Value added is good in these subjects.
- Students perform very well in lessons they are highly committed and work hard throughout. The quality of their responses shows that they are understanding, assimilating and able to recall and use the information well.

- The written work seen is generally of a very good standard it is well marked and annotated corrections with omissions.

### Teaching, training and learning

- The teaching is highly effective. Lessons are particularly well planned and there is much prior preparation and consideration of the ways of delivering the material.
- There is a lot of variety of teaching and learning methods employed. No lesson is overly dominated by the teachers with plenty of hand-on activities for the students. Differentiation is well considered with much work of varying difficulty not only to meet the needs of the less able but also to ensure that the very brightest students are stretched and are meeting their potential.
- There was much evidence of analysis and use of preferred learning styles in the planning and delivery of lessons.
- ILT is being developed quickly. Students are beginning to use the VLE very effectively. Staff have worked hard to introduce materials that are of value to the students.
- There is much celebration of student success: wall displays give the rooms a clear subject identity, enliven them and are used to show off students' work.
- Homework is set regularly, students know exactly what they have to do to improve and to achieve their goals. Testing is a regular part of lessons. Students have realistic targets that they well understand and that are used routinely in progress chasing during courses and particularly during the formal reviews twice a year.

### Programmes and activities

- Enrichment activities – regular lunch time lectures, annual activities from outside agencies, many visits some with financial support to courses at universities- help with applications and interviewing techniques.
- Equality and diversity is promoted through the teaching and support arrangements.
- There is a good range of GCE AS and A level science programmes. These are highly popular and numbers have grown substantially over the last three years.
- There are close links with the schools.

### Guidance and support

- Each student is treated with great respect and there is a strong climate of team work not only amongst the staff but also with the students. They are treated as equals and respond to it well.
- Much work is done to identify students at risk of underperforming. The learning disciplines are very well established right from the start of courses – students know exactly what is expected of them and they respond to this well.
- There is a lot of additional help given to students – those that are underperforming are identified quickly and extra help/work given, much extension work to ensure the brighter students are stretched.

- Staff take their duty of care very seriously following up all cases rigorously.
- Tutorial programmes are supportive and help students to learn life skills.

#### Leadership and management

- The college has robust and highly effective systems to manage the provision that are adhered to by all staff. Departmental meetings are frequent and lines of communication very good.
- There is an ILT strategy and staff are confident in the use of ILT in lessons. Students use the VLE in college and from home.
- The roles and responsibilities for raising standards and maintaining them at high levels are very clear. Departmental policies are well written and understood by all.
- Good practice is shared well through team meetings and many other ways – lines of communication are good. Staff are frequently discussing better ways of delivering topics.
- Materials identified through the learning coaches programme are used.
- Self assessment is thorough and follows closely the college system. It makes good use of data to evaluate the provision and to set targets to improve. Internal lesson observations are also well used to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. The summaries are particularly good in identifying good practice and areas for improvement.
- Good use is made of students' views derived from questionnaires and focus groups.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- improve the success rates and value added in human biology and environmental sciences
- further develop the VLE and the use of ILT
- notes of departmental meetings do not identify very clearly action points or responsible personnel.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science courses in the college.

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

Yours sincerely

John R Phipps  
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (Retired)