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05 July 2007

Mr Paul Moss  
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Dear Mr Moss

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 June 2007 to look at your school's curriculum and how it contributes to standards and achievement, teaching and learning and inclusion.

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

The evidence used to inform the judgements made include interviews with staff, meetings with students, lesson observations and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The enthusiasm and sense of purpose shared by staff and students as well as detailed in-school assessment data indicate that the impact of recent curriculum innovations on teaching and learning, achievement and standards have been at least good and, in some instances, outstanding.

#### Achievement and standards

The achievement of students by the time they leave the school is good, with results being in the top 25% of schools nationally in value-added terms. Greatest progress at this stage is made by less able students, reflecting the decisions made to extend vocational options to include a range of BTEC courses. In-school assessments indicate that well-directed support, clear targets and rigorous monitoring are proving effective. Progress across Years 7 to 9 and levels reached in national tests at the end of Year 9 have been below

national averages, most markedly in science and mathematics. The school has responded to this by focusing on how pupils learn rather than on content coverage, to give tailor-made support to under-achieving students and challenge the most able. Again, in-school assessments indicate that results will soon show a significant improvement.

## Teaching and learning

Montgomery High has taken the lead in local initiatives to investigate learning styles and to see how effective learning can be embedded in schemes of work and tracked through appropriate assessment. The involvement of 'student ambassadors' who participate in programmes of professional development and then cascade what they have learnt back through the student community is characteristic of the school's active commitment to collaborative teaching and learning and the confidence placed in students' readiness to rise to challenge maturely. The rapport between students and staff is exceptionally positive. Mutual trust and a shared pride in the school underpin a pervasive ethos expressed through cheerful courtesy and confidence. Occasional disaffection is quickly and effectively dealt with: in one lesson, for example, tensions within a group were resolved by being transformed into purposeful discussion about the topics being studied – it was skilfully managed. Approaches to learning concentrate on organisational and thinking skills, on communication, reflection, problem-solving and Information Technology competencies. There is not always effective differentiation during lessons, especially with regard to higher ability students.

## Curriculum

The defining principle for Montgomery High's curriculum innovation is 'personalised learning' - through careful grouping of students into relatively small, cohesive communities with agreed priorities, a wide and flexible range of options, schemes of work tailored to match a variety of learning styles, clear and manageable personal targets and strong care and guidance. Students as a whole value the school's breadth and flexibility of curriculum provision.

After a period of careful assessment in Year 7, students are placed into one of four pathways for Years 8 and 9, each with a content and style that suit particular student needs and ambitions. The school is introducing a programme of study based on the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme, with learning organised to highlight cross-curricular connections and connections between subject content and the 'real' world. There is a particular emphasis on languages and their cultural context. Assessment is through personal projects, applying IB criteria. Those students opting for two languages understand clearly how this enhances their future prospects. The school's active promotion of BTEC courses has given a manageable and rewarding set of options for students not comfortable with a

more traditionally academic provision. Most progress to further education or training.

### Leadership and management

The school has benefited from continuity as well as strength of senior leadership. Willingness to be innovative, after careful investigation of national and international models and consideration of the practicalities involved, and readiness to learn from experience ensure that management of the curriculum continues to be dynamic. There is significant investment in professional development, with time ring-fenced each week for sharing good practice, developing and evaluating schemes of work and investigating new methodologies. Senior and middle managers are encouraged to participate in community projects, such as the 'Tower Networked Learning Community' which brought together staff from three primary and three secondary schools. Selected teachers are being trained as coaches, to ensure that the principles underpinning curriculum innovation are matched by high-level professional skills. Ways in which to monitor the impact of this significant investment of time and resources are not currently systematic, although positive outcomes are certainly observable. A key strength of the school is its evident cohesiveness with no discernible divide between teaching staff, middle management and the leadership team.

### Inclusion

The school's differentiated pathways and range of options successfully include and support students of all abilities and with a range of special needs. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities progress as well as other students and their successes are properly celebrated. Targeted, specialist support is given when needed, complemented by good links with external agencies.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included ensuring that:

- differentiation in lessons engages and extends the full ability range
- the impact of investment in curriculum, teaching and learning is systematically monitored.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your curriculum.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham  
Her Majesty's Inspector