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Mr Mark Anderson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Anderson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – a comparison of the effectiveness of post 16 providers

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit to the school on 16 and 17 October 2007 to look at work in level 3 provision.

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 and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and short visits to seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of level 3 provision was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good. Most students enter the sixth form with below average prior attainment. They make good progress in most subjects and standards are broadly in line with the national average by age 19. Results at advanced supplementary level are lower than national averages although students achieve well in relation to their starting points. Most students who begin level 3 courses complete them. Attendance to the majority of lessons is high although the school is aware that in a few subject areas in Year 12 they are relatively low.

Students' progress is closely monitored through robust systems and school data shows that most students on level 3 courses meet their challenging targets. Underachievement is quickly identified and individual support plans, negotiated with

students, are effective in enabling most to make good progress. Consequently students have a good knowledge of their strengths and areas for development and a clear understanding of the expectation the school has of them. As a result many are raising their sights and aspirations; all go on to higher education or employment and many are the first in their families to go to university.

### Quality of teaching and learning of level 3 provision

The quality of teaching and learning at level 3, including support and guidance is good. Lesson planning appears effective in achieving the best fit between course requirements and activities to meet students' learning needs. Students' note taking and listening skills are well developed. However, the concentration on a narrow range of teaching and learning styles and a general lack of emphasis in developing and refining students' independent learning skills are recognised by the school as a general weakness in teaching and learning. In some lessons teachers' questioning effectively challenges students to think and reason. This was well demonstrated in a chemistry lesson where students were challenged to predict what chemical reaction may happen and give a hypothesis based upon their earlier reading and tests.

Teachers' specialist subject knowledge is used well to advise and guide students about how to improve the quality of their work and to support their preparation for examinations. Good relationships between students and teachers help to promote the effectiveness of this advice and guidance. The assessment of students' work and the tracking and monitoring of individual students' progress, including those with learning difficulties and those who are gifted and talented, are good. Students' performance towards achieving their targets is closely monitored through regular half-termly review meetings and 'learning discussions' between students and tutors. Students say that the meetings help them to organise their learning and, as a result, they have a very clear idea of what to do to improve their work. Students' progress across different subjects is effectively tracked by year heads and tutors.

### Quality of curriculum

The extent to which programmes and activities meet students' needs and interests is good. Students have a wide choice of academic courses, and collaboration with other schools and higher education institutions effectively extends the level 3 curriculum and enhances the provision of information, advice and guidance. However, opportunities to study vocational courses alongside academic ones are at an early stage of development.

Students settle smoothly into their studies as a result of effective induction. Great care is taken to meet students' expectations and personal development plans. Many students, particularly those who are gifted and talented, benefit from enhanced course provision and opportunities for further study; for example language students have opportunities to study two modern foreign languages and others study higher level mathematics at the local university. Opportunities to assist in the learning of younger pupils and to take responsibility for organising social events enrich and develop students' communication, numeracy and key skills. These opportunities

contribute to their enjoyment of sixth form life and their high levels of satisfaction with their courses.

### Leadership and management of level 3 provision

Leadership and management are good. Self-evaluation is effective and is well supported through good monitoring and evaluation. The teaching and learning observation scheme is rigorous and evaluative. Consequently leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in provision and take action to tackle them. Consistent systems to set targets and monitor student progress have been established. Collaboration at level 3 is at an early stage of development and is beginning to impact positively in extending the academic curriculum. Opportunities to share information to support school leaders further in assessing the quality of provision and to inform self-evaluation are developing as a result of collaborative activity.

### Inclusion

Inclusion is good. Small numbers of black and minority ethnic students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities make at least satisfactory and often good progress. Support and guidance for students intending to go to university and for gifted and talented students is good. Students feel well supported and the close relationships with staff and students encourage them to seek guidance and support.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing a wider range of teaching and learning styles to improve students' independent learning skills
- improving the attendance and retention rates on some courses in Year 12.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop level 3 provision in the sixth form.

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

Gina White  
Her Majesty's Inspector