

30 December 2008

Mr James Cockburn
Headteacher
Longbenton Community College
Hailsham Avenue
Longbenton
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE12 8ER

Dear Mr Cockburn

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college on the 22 October 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please convey my thanks to your chair of governors, local authority representative and school improvement partner (SIP) for finding time to talk to me about the progress of the college since the last inspection. Would you also thank those students who met with me over lunch to talk about life at college.

Since the previous inspection, senior staff have refocused on performance management and subject accountability, identifying and clarifying improved procedures for assessing the quality of provision across the college. Some new staff have been appointed, including one with leadership responsibilities in the college's specialist area of design technology.

As a result of the inspection in March 2008, the college was asked to:

- ensure that senior leaders monitor all the college's work effectively
- make sure that the college complies fully with current Government requirements for safeguarding
- ensure that more students in Key Stage 3 reach higher levels in science
- adapt the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to meet better the needs of all students.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the college is making good progress in addressing the areas for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement at both key stages.

The 2007 test and examination results showed that standards at Key Stage 3 were above average in English and mathematics, including at Level 6 or higher. Science

was broadly average, as it was in the previous year, and had fewer students achieving the higher levels than found nationally. At Key Stage 4, results were above average for five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, and average when including English and mathematics. Overall, students' progress and achievement were good. The unvalidated 2008 Key Stage 3 results show that English and mathematics are still above average. Although science improved upon its 2007 results by three percentage points, it is still broadly average. The students' attainment at the higher levels was similar to 2007 in all three core subjects. The Key Stage 4 2008 unvalidated results are broadly similar to the previous year. Accordingly, students' progress has remained good. The college has set itself very ambitious targets for improvement, and although it missed them marginally at both key stages in 2008, students' overall achievement is good, given the above average standards achieved from an average starting point at the beginning of Year 7. At sixth form level, the unvalidated 2008 results show an improvement from the previous year, and generally remain in line with national averages.

The college's procedures for monitoring its work have improved. Senior leaders have strengthened the processes for monitoring teaching and learning, with clear lines of accountability from individual teachers through to middle and senior managers. There is a regular and thorough system of lesson observations, and the most recent data available indicate that the overall percentage of good or better teaching is improving as a result of this monitoring. The systems for assessing students' progress are good overall. The newly introduced 'monthly progress monitoring interview' for Year 11 students is helping the college to focus very clearly on its very ambitious target of achieving an 8% increase this year in the number of students achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. There are indications of modest gains being made at this time towards this end-of-year target. The work of external partners, including the local authority and the SIP, has contributed to the college's better awareness of its strengths and weaknesses.

The college is working steadily to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are in place. It awaits the start of work to install safety fencing around the car park and, when complete, will align this with improved safety procedures for all those entering and leaving the site. Work on compiling the single central register has been completed fully, with all relevant checks being made and recorded.

The college is taking well judged steps to develop its Key Stage 3 curriculum better to meet the needs of all students. The college has maintained its work with higher performing students through its 'express groups'. The unvalidated 2008 Key Stage 3 data show that these students performed very well in relation to their Year 9 counterparts. Additional intervention classes in literacy, numeracy and science are also helping the college to identify quickly those students underperforming relative to their capabilities in these core subjects. The college has responded positively to the issue raised in the previous inspection about developing the curriculum for lower attaining students. A 'transition group' has been formed in Year 7 for those students leaving their primary schools with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

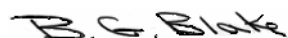
Changes to their timetabled provision have been made in order to support their learning needs. However, as this initiative only began in September, the impact of this work cannot yet be fully assessed.

The college is making good use of its specialist status in technology to improve the curricular opportunities for the students, with results at GCSE in the specialist areas improving. The leadership and management of the college is progressing well, and senior staff, governors and the local authority are all keen to ensure that there is a trend of continuous improvement. The current college development plan includes a range of suitable areas for improvement, but there is a lack of clarity about the actions identified to address the specific issues highlighted in the previous inspection.

The local authority's post-inspection action plan, which was approved by Ofsted, details a range of suitable actions for supporting the college. Ongoing support, including monitoring visits, has been good and is helping the college to assess its progress against the issues raised in the previous inspection. The quality of support from the SIP is also good.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your college.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B.G. Blake". The letters are slightly slanted and connected, with a cursive-like style.

B G Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector