

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



10 January 2009

Mrs E Newton  
Headteacher  
Aston Comprehensive A Specialist School in Mathematics and Computing  
Aughton Road  
Swallownest  
Sheffield  
South Yorkshire  
S26 4SF

Dear Mrs Newton

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 October 2008 to look at work in promoting equality.

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 without their consent.

The school serves an area of very little disadvantage. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is not much more than half the national average. Very few students come from minority ethnic groups and virtually all speak English as their main language. Fewer than average students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Of 1794 students on roll, only three were new arrivals last year and only six are looked after by the local authority.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of parts of lessons and interviews with staff, students and three parents.

The quality of your provision to promote equalities is outstanding.

Features of good practice observed

- Despite the fact that there are minimal numbers of students from traditionally vulnerable groups, there is not a shred of complacency in the rigour with which potentially vulnerable students from any background are identified and supported. There is full recognition that any individual can

pass through phases of vulnerability for a host of reasons. The school has a wide range of well co-ordinated approaches to ensure that support is provided quickly for all students who need it.

- Many initiatives contribute to a perceptive tailoring of the curriculum to meet individual needs. Students in the Nurture Group and also those in the Key Stage 3 Pilot Group particularly benefit from a timetable that simplifies their school life by reducing the number of different teachers and classroom settings they encounter each day. Many of these students find this reassuring and as a result enjoy school more and make better progress. The success of the Nurture Group is evident in the number of students who return successfully to mainstream classes.
- The role of pastoral managers for each year group has passed from teachers to non-teaching staff. This has proved very successful in that these managers, because they have no teaching commitment, are much more accessible to students and parents and can respond more promptly to concerns.
- Key Stage 4 provision is very carefully tailored to meet students' needs. An Accelerated Learning initiative has been very successful in maintaining the engagement of a group of students who have been identified as being at risk of disaffection. There has been considerable investment in computers and staffing has been enhanced. Many of the students involved are entered for up to five GCSE exams at the end of Year 10, opening up opportunities for different options in Year 11, with students being buoyed up by earlier success. A dedicated invigilation team helps tailor accreditation opportunities to meet individual needs. Students in this group report that they like being in the same class all day every day. The school is more successful than most in ensuring that nearly all students leave with at least some success in GCSE exams.
- All students who spoke to the inspector enjoyed school and felt themselves valued. Those who spend most of their class time in discrete provision still feel a part of the whole school community and are represented on the school council.
- The school makes excellent use of its specialism, in computing, to trace records of new arrivals, sometimes from schools and agencies in far away countries. In a recent instance, a newly arrived student with very little ability to communicate in English was helped to settle quickly into the school because key staff already had a good understanding of his potential vulnerability.
- Parents of vulnerable students greatly appreciate the support they and their children get from the school. Several speak glowingly of the quality of communication and the way in which it helps them to provide further support for their children. As one pointed out, 'They know my name because my child is doing well, not because he's being naughty'.

#### Area for development

- The Alternative Provision initiative has been successful in providing for students who have been excluded from other forms of provision but it is not made sufficiently clear to students or their parents what their

curricular entitlement is and how it differs from the rest of the school. This is because there is no discrete curriculum policy for Alternative Provision.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in your school.

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

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger  
Additional Inspector