

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Dr G Metcalfe
Headteacher
The Freeston Business and Enterprise College
Favell Avenue
Normanton
West Yorkshire
WF6 1HZ

Dear Dr Metcalfe

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 3 November 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 evidence used to inform the judgements made included: scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of parts of four lessons and interviews with staff, students, a governor, a parent and representatives of several other organisations who contribute to the promotion of equality throughout the school.

There were many aspects of good practice, as detailed below. The majority of the lessons observed during the inspection with regard to vulnerable students were satisfactory. As a result the quality of your provision to promote equalities is satisfactory with many good features.

Features of good practice observed

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been well adapted to promote different pathways for different groups of students. These routes include 'Smartattack', which provides a vocational curriculum for lower attaining students identified as vulnerable to disaffection. The success of this initiative is evident in improved behaviour in lower sets and the development of more positive attitudes.
- Early intervention, through the development of the 'Grow' project is currently extending the benefits of the 'Smartattack' pathway to students lower down the school who are identified as likely candidates for the

pathway on reaching Year 10. The early signs are that this initiative is having a positive impact on attendance and a reduction in exclusions.

- Arrangements for transition from primary school into the college are very good. These arrangements are particularly helpful to pupils who are considered potentially vulnerable to failure on transfer from smaller schools into this much larger one. Students say that they are reassured by these arrangements, and they settle in successfully.
- Students from families where English is not the main language spoken are strongly encouraged to maintain links with their own cultures so as to prepare them well for the possibility of returning to the country of their birth. This is particularly the case with students from Eastern Europe.
- The school maintains very close links with professionals from other agencies and organisations and is thus able to garner an in-depth understanding of the circumstances that could be affecting students' progress, personal development or well-being. Communication between these parties is good, contributing well to a strong system of pastoral care, especially for the most vulnerable.

Areas for development

- Teachers do not pay sufficient attention to varying classroom tasks to ensure that all students can work with a similar degree of independence and with equal opportunities for achieving success. In too many lessons, tasks are identical, even when some students are identified as gifted or talented whilst others have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Attendance at out of class activities is recorded but not sufficiently analysed to identify possible areas that could be improved to broaden their appeal to different groups of students.

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