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Mr R Cathcart  
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Dear Mr Cathcart

Ofsted survey inspection programme – New models of school leadership:  
influences and outcomes

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 06 February 2009 to evaluate the impact of new models of leadership on school improvement.

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 about the sixth form included discussions with colleague headteachers, governors, staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the model of leadership on the sixth form, a federation with three other comprehensive schools, is good.

The impact of the model of leadership on achievement and standards in the sixth form is good.

- From broadly average starting points, students make good progress and achieve well. Provisional test and examination results for 2008 are better than in 2007 and 2006 and demonstrate an effective track record of improvement.
- The federation adds very positive value to the education of learners of average and below average attainment. Senior leaders recognise the need to further raise the achievement of those capable of the highest attainment.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their peers because of effective, personalised intervention and support.

- Data show that the achievement of students who previously had poor attendance is rising due to the rigorous focus the federation has placed on improving their attendance and punctuality.
- Senior leaders' effective tracking of progress is having a positive impact on raising standards and achievement. However, there is scope to further strengthen teachers' use of assessment data to identify and secure students' next steps in learning.

The impact of the model of leadership on the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good.

- Teaching and learning are good overall. Students highlight that most lessons are stimulating and enable them to learn successfully. Occasionally they feel they are insufficiently challenged by the work set.
- The harmonious relationships between staff and students contribute significantly to the very positive learning environment and high standards of behaviour.
- Lesson planning includes learning objectives but is sometimes too focused on teaching activity and not specific enough about what students of different abilities will learn.
- The sharing of good practice within the federation is beneficial. Senior leaders have recently provided very helpful guidance to staff to raise awareness about different teaching styles and assessment for learning strategies.

The impact of the model of leadership on the quality of the curriculum in the sixth form is outstanding.

- The innovative, wide ranging curriculum enables students, to study a combination of courses, including specialist subjects to suit their academic, vocational and personal needs.
- Heads of departments from the schools in the federation meet regularly to share subject information, update courses, devise new pathways and exchange best practice to ensure high quality experiences for the students.
- The development of cross-federation leadership roles contributes to the improvement of provision. For example, the federation is in the process of appointing a coordinator to ensure gifted and talented students are appropriately challenged.
- Effective arrangements are in place to support the high number of students going on to higher education. Good quality careers advice is in place for those choosing other pathways.
- Highly effective collaboration ensures students have very good opportunities to enrich their educational experiences. For example, art students from across the federation recently visited New York and field visits for both A level and BTEC programmes are jointly planned and shared.
- Global links are well forged through a range of subjects including the option for students to take up placements in Russia, Cuba and China.

The impact of the new model of leadership on the quality of leadership and management in the sixth form is good.

- The sharp focus on raising standards, the clear ambition and drive of the headteachers, strong governance and joint management structures are key features of the federation's good leadership and management.
- Communication between the four schools is very effective and ensures policies and practices are coherent and clearly understood.
- A common approach to evaluation and a shared commitment to continuous professional development underpin the good pace of improvement. The next step is to articulate the strategic aims of the partnership more robustly in written plans and to pinpoint specific success criteria for key priorities.

The impact of the new model of leadership on inclusion in the sixth form is outstanding.

- There is strong emphasis on improving the academic achievement and social development of all groups of students across the federation.
- High quality induction arrangements ensure that the third of students transferring to the sixth form from schools beyond the neighbourhood do so with confidence.
- Pastoral welfare systems, including progress review days, are highly effective and result in very high retention rates with virtually all students leaving with recognised qualifications.
- Events such as 'AIM higher' assist students in making choices and focusing on their future economic well-being.
- The federation's inclusive ethos is reflected in the improving attendance of students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to raise standards so that more students attain the highest examination grades
- improving teaching quality through a sharper focus on how well students are learning and by using assessment information to ensure all students are challenged appropriately
- ensuring improvement plans pinpoint specific success criteria for key priorities.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

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

Christine Field  
Additional Inspector