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Mr R Babbage
St John's School
Austin Canons,
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Dear Mr Babbage

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Moving through the system

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 February 2009 to look at work on developing the future economic well-being of pupils in your school. I also looked at how well arrangements are made to support pupils during their transition from one stage of education to the next and in preparation for leaving school.

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:

- meetings with yourself and staff
- observation of parts of two lessons
- a visit to Biddenham Upper School
- discussions with a class of Year 6 pupils, with four students at post-16 and informal discussion with individual students at the Biddenham annexe
- review of documentation.

Overall, your work in developing the future economic well-being of pupils in your school is outstanding. Pupils demonstrate through their enthusiastic involvement in lessons and other activities, a strongly developing self-confidence and readiness to work constructively with others. Through your exceptionally thorough arrangements for transition, pupils learn to deal with change and become increasingly independent as they move through the school. Older pupils make very good progress in their financial literacy and in their understanding of their future options. Through work-related learning, work experience and college placements, pupils also develop a very good understanding of the disciplines required by the workplace and gain a wealth of valuable skills.

Features of effective practice:

- Pupils and students are very enthusiastic, focused and motivated. They enjoy school a great deal. Their behaviour is outstanding and they apply themselves very well. They



become increasingly independent as they move through the school. Individual needs are met exceptionally well, and individual education plans are specific, highly measurable and focus on applied skills and economic well-being. Achievement is outstanding in the school as a whole and at post-16. During their time in post-16 provision, students gain a very wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding to promote their economic well-being and prepare them for leaving school.

- Both the lessons sampled were outstanding with very clear learning objectives matched to pupils' individual learning needs. Pupils' basic skills of literacy and numeracy were promoted well and they received excellent support. In a lesson in Year 11, teaching placed very strong emphasis on applied skills in mathematics and real world learning. Activities in class were linked exceptionally well to a recent shopping trip into the community, and very good use of information and communication technology meant that pupils were able to relate this to the applied mathematical skills needed when paying for shopping.
- The curriculum for economic well-being is comprehensive and very well planned. The focus of the curriculum is on preparing pupils and students for the next phase of their education and lives. Up to the end of Key Stage 3, a broad and balanced curriculum provides ample opportunities for pupils to develop their basic skills in communication, language and literacy, problem solving, reasoning and numeracy, physical development, and personal, social and emotional development. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is tailored to developing pupils' independence and is brought together into a coherent whole through the transition challenge qualification. At post-16, work towards the independence qualification is complemented by a wide range of vocational and practical experiences. College and work experience placements are matched very closely to students' interests and aspirations. The location of the school's post-16 provision on the site of Biddenham Upper School does much to broaden students' awareness, provides opportunities for them to integrate with their mainstream peers and prepare very well for the next stage of their education.
- The school has excellent, extremely thorough systems for passing on information about pupils and students from one class to another, one key stage to another, when pupils move to the Biddenham site, when they attend college and work experience placements and when they move on at post-19. The handover of pupil information and preparation for the new school year document shows just how extensive these transition procedures are. In addition, very sharply defined individual education plans assist transition and provide continuity through their focus on promoting economic well-being and life skills. Activities are carefully graduated across the three years at post-16, so that students make a gradual transition towards leaving school and gain a range of appropriate skills closely matched to their individual needs. Post-19 transition reports show extremely thorough planning for when students leave. Students' existing skills, interests, aspirations and needs are matched as closely as possible to the opportunities provided by receiving institutions. This means that as far as possible, from the range of opportunities available, there is a very close link between students' prior attainment and their expressed desires and aspirations and future plans for them.
- Careers education is firmly embedded within the curriculum and the school works very closely with the Connexions personal adviser and a wide range of other agencies and educational establishments to find the best possible placements for students. The headteacher sits on two groups in the local authority; the 14-19 Strategic Forum and the Learning and Skills Council's Learning for Living forum, ensuring that the school is

working with Connexions at a strategic level to encourage a joined up approach to transition. Through the Connexions personal adviser working with students up to the age of 25, there is strong continuity after students move on at the end of their time at St John's. The school's Building Schools for the Future initiative will include provision for 19 to 25 year olds and strategic planning is already well underway.

- The senior leaders' strategy for the development of economic well-being is extremely clear and comprehensive. The school has highly developed tracking systems for checking the progress of individuals and it has recently synthesised the wealth of data it gathers to arrive at clearly defined evaluative judgements about individual's overall achievement. Senior leaders are very aware of the latest developments and requirements. For example, they have already undertaken a detailed audit of the school's provision based on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's framework for economic well-being. In addition, the school has recently engaged in a thorough planning exercise in submitting a bid for specialist school status. As a result of these activities, senior leaders and managers have an exceptionally clear knowledge of existing strengths and areas for possible improvement. The headteacher and senior leaders are key players in striving for increased opportunities for students when they leave school, especially in efforts to increase post-19 provision for young people with multi-sensory impairment, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.

Areas for further improvement, which we discussed, include:

- To work with other agencies and businesses to develop increased opportunities for work placements at post-16, especially for students with multi-sensory impairment, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop economic well-being in the school.

As I explained, 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

Margaret Goodchild

Additional inspector