

18 May 2009

Mr John McGee
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McGee

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college on 15 May 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like to thank your leadership team, the students and the local authority representative for giving their time to meet with me.

Since the previous inspection the college has made provision for a small number of Year 7 and 8 pupils from a feeder middle school which has closed. A partnership between the feeder schools and the college, Whitcliffe Education Improvement Partnership (WEIP), has been formed. The college has secured permanent staffing in all leadership roles within departments. The leadership team has been restructured and the college has achieved Artsmark Gold.

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

- accelerate students' rate of progress at Key Stage 4
- improve GCSE and post-16 results in science
- monitor teaching and learning far more rigorously, so that many more lessons are interesting and suitably challenging
- ensure that development plans include clear and measurable criteria by which improvement can be checked.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

The improved profile of the quality of teaching has done much to improve rates of progress for all students. From disappointing levels in 2007, results recovered well in 2008 and students made good progress in relation to their starting points. The number of students gaining good GCSE results has continued a steady improvement

in line with national rates. In 2008, the proportion of students achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE was 56%; this represents significant improvement on previous years. However, the college recognises there is work still to be done to improve GCSE results when English and mathematics are included. A-Level pass rates in 2008 represented the college's best results, placing them in the top percentile of sixth forms nationally in the context of adding value to students' attainment.

The college has introduced an effective tracking and monitoring system enabling accurate analysis of student's rates of progress. Tracking data are regularly scrutinised by senior leaders and departmental managers. Any emerging gaps in students' performance triggers action from senior leaders in consultation with individual teachers.

The tracking system indicates that the college is well placed to improve results in science at GCSE and post-16 over the next two years. The science curriculum is practical in nature, capturing students' imagination through first-hand exploration and investigation. Earlier staffing difficulties within the science department have been resolved and the subject leadership strengthened. A system for early entry for Year 10 students already shows that 90% of students entered are on track to gain their GCSE at grades A* to G. Staff are determined to improve these results further in 2010 where current data indicate that the majority of students are on target to achieve their GCSE at Grade C or above.

Senior staff have established a robust system for monitoring teaching and learning and have rightly focused their judgements on the outcomes for students, emphasising achievement, independence and engagement with the lesson. Levels of challenge, particularly for the more able, are much improved and strengthened by the students' knowledge of their own targets; a key feature of lessons is students' understanding of how these can be achieved. Senior staff have been trained for their monitoring role and the college has identified a strong core of good and outstanding teachers who act as mentors and coaches where support for teaching is required. In addition, the college is to extend the monitoring of teaching and learning to include scrutiny of students' books. The college has improved the quality of teaching so that it is increasingly good. Planning identifies clear objectives and a rapid, purposeful pace to the lesson with information and communication technology (ICT) used effectively to promote students' understanding of key concepts. Staff recognise that they are at the early stages of implementing their assessment processes for students and have plans to incorporate these more consistently into lesson planning. There is now a strong emphasis on students' enjoyment in lessons. The college ethos of 'Enjoy, achieve and celebrate' is tangible in classrooms where students are consistently on task and willingly contribute to both theory and practical sessions. These improvements are underpinned by the revised curriculum. It is highly relevant to students' needs and linked strongly to the local business and community needs through the college's business and enterprise status. All these elements combine effectively to ensure exciting learning opportunities for students through, for example, role play, sports coaching or media presentations.

The college's development planning process has undergone a radical change. All planning includes clear and measurable criteria directly linked to outcomes for students. Senior leaders are fully involved in the process and a strong feature is the use of tracking data and well informed targets. These are reviewed through regular and systematic monitoring, reflecting an urgency from all leaders not only to improve outcomes for students but also to build a strong capacity for the college to improve further.

The college makes effective use of its business and enterprise status to improve outcomes for its students. This is a driving factor in the aim to raise standards in its specialist subjects, particularly in mathematics.

The partnership with the local authority is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning, for example through the provision of an advanced skills teacher. This key role not only supports college-based staff but also aims to promote high quality teaching across the Whitcliffe partnership of schools.

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

Yours sincerely

James Kilner
Her Majesty's Inspector