

Prospects Learning Services Ltd  
Prospects House  
19 Elmfield Road  
Bromley, Kent  
BR1 1LT

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 020 8315 1250  
Direct F 020 8315 1279  
[Meena.Wood@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Meena.Wood@ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr John Edwards  
Headteacher  
Kings International College for Business and the Arts  
Watchetts Drive  
Camberley  
Surrey  
GU15 2PQ

Dear Mr Edwards

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 June 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the extensive information which you provided before and during my visit. Please do pass on our thanks to staff and students for welcoming us into the lessons. In particular, please extend our thanks to students who gave up their time to meet with us, who were present at our feedback session and spoke with great passion about the school's strengths and the areas where it could improve.

As a result of the inspection on 3 and 4 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise achievement and standards in all year groups, particularly in English and science and ensure that all students have a good grasp of basic literacy skills in order to make faster progress
- improve teaching and learning so that work is closely matched to students' needs
- improve marking and the use of assessment information to track students' progress, so that underachievement can be identified early and progress accelerated
- develop the skills of leaders at all levels so they can better drive improvement through rigorously monitoring and evaluating the college's work.

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

In the short time since the finalisation of action plans, arising from the inspection report in February, the school has been rigorous in its response. The headteacher, together with his senior and middle managers have made good progress in implementing thorough, detailed operational plans that effectively address the areas for improvement. Good progress has been made in prioritising teaching in English



and science; teachers are focusing much more on students' learning and progress. The school has started to implement assessing pupils' progress (APP) and assessment for learning (AFL) in English. This is beginning to have some impact on accelerating attainment in Years 7-9 and the achievement of five GCSE A\* to C grades, excluding English and mathematics.

Around 61% of current Year 11 students are predicted to gain five GCSE A\* to C grades, which would be slightly lower than the national average and in line with the school's own target, indicating that these students will make the progress expected of them. Progress for students in five GCSE A\* to C, including English and mathematics, has been more limited. The school is not in line to meet this target in 2009 but predicts that it will meet the lower targets that it has set itself, with 43% of students attaining five GCSE A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics. These students are making satisfactory progress, especially in English. The school is addressing attainment across all subjects through its actions this year and is working to raise achievement for students through the Literacy Matters initiative, which focuses on improving students' reading and writing skills across the curriculum. The school recognises that this has yet to be systematically implemented.

The school is making satisfactory progress in raising the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the excellent APP programme in English is well implemented and is beginning to be rolled out in other areas, including science, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT). The APP process in lessons is enabling teachers to assess each student's progress against specific criteria across the four language skills and to record this systematically, so that both staff and students are aware of the progress being made. This is used to plan lessons better to meet students' needs.

Through lesson observations, managers are beginning to mentor individual teachers. Effective training from the local authority School Improvement Partner, on how to conduct lesson observations, has provided good-quality feedback to teachers and is beginning to bear fruit. Lesson observations are more focused on the link between teaching and the achievement and behaviour of students.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a range of contextually relevant and stimulating materials in lessons, particularly in English. Nevertheless, the pace and content of activities are not consistently matched to students' levels and capabilities. More able students are not sufficiently challenged. Learning support staff do not plan lessons together with teachers. Therefore, students at early stages of learning English, advanced bilingual students, and less confident or less able students are not helped to engage fully in question and answer sessions. Some students struggle to complete learning activities satisfactorily. Support for these students outside lessons is good. Managers are working hard to implement assessment for learning across subjects. Assessment of students' knowledge and progress in lessons does not consistently enable students and teachers to know what learning has taken place. In some cases, good examples exist in lessons of learning outcomes being assessed against curricular levels, along with some excellent examples of peer and self-

assessment. Assessment of students' work is improving, but the quality of marking is still variable across subjects. The school has developed an effectively structured assessment process that ensures the regular completion of assignments through the intranet. These are assessed and recorded as part of the monitoring of students' progress. As yet, this has taken place for students in Year 7 and 8 and the school is aware that it needs to share the process and outcomes more widely with students and parents.

The school has put in place a sound process of the early identification of students who are underachieving, which is linked to the provision of additional subject support. Students reported that this system would be more effective if the take-up of the support was more rigorously implemented by staff and not left as optional. Students' targets are now beginning to be more focused on precise learning goals and students reported that the bi-annual student review days where parents are invited, are greatly valued. However, students felt these do not offer parents sufficiently regular opportunities to formally review the progress their children make against their learning targets. They would welcome more regular progress checks, either face to face, or through the intranet, especially in those instances, where a child is at risk of underachieving.

The school is successfully addressing its capacity to develop leadership skills. For example, middle leaders conduct more rigorous departmental monitoring and, as a result, can evidence the impact of teaching and learning on achievement and standards. Managers are successfully ensuring that teachers submit electronically reliable and valid data on students' attainment and progress against curricular targets. This has had an enormous impact on changing the ethos of the school. Managers and teachers are more confident in their understanding and use of data on students. Easy access to data has enabled staff to plan lessons more effectively in order to meet the different needs of all learners. Heads of year too can monitor the progress of all students more closely, in order to make timely interventions. Monitoring of departments by senior managers now includes governors, and has been strengthened, with a clear focus on learning outcomes.

Discussions with staff and students have indicated how much they value the changes that have taken place. This has been demonstrated through improving the ethos of sharing good practice among staff on teaching and assessment practice. Collection and analysis of data and their corporate understanding of it drive improvement, with students receiving more structured help from staff, in order to raise standards of attainment.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood  
Her Majesty's Inspector