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Mrs A Lakey
Chief Executive
The Durham Federation
Durham Community Business College/
Fyndoune Community College
c/o Bracken Court
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Dear Mrs Lakey

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) - three year longitudinal survey.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my final visit on 16 and 17 September to look at work in sustainability.

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. This was a follow up monitoring visit which is intended to assess the progress the school has made in developing sustainability throughout the school since the previous visit.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, the community police officer and a governor, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of six lessons and one assembly, visits to a number of classrooms and facilities around both schools as well as general observations of the school grounds and environment.

Overall, since the last visit, good progress has been made in developing sustainability across the Federation. Both schools are approaching sustainability from different but complementary perspectives. The overall effectiveness is good with some aspects which are potentially outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ESD are good with students' personal development in terms of trying to live in a sustainable way being good also.

- Sustainability is now a part of the life of both schools. There is a clear awareness among most students of the need to lead much more sustainable lives. In part this is due to the higher profile sustainability has in both schools but also to raised awareness caused by current economic and social pressures.
- Students have a good understanding of issues linked to climate change, global warming and the need to preserve, recycle and make better use of resources. Many are committed to making a difference and encourage their parents to do the same at home.
- There is good evidence for attitudinal change with many more students appreciative of the need to lead more healthy lives. Students report walking to school when previously they may have been driven.
- There is clear evidence for greater social responsibility among the greater majority of students. Attendance and behaviour have improved and there is much reduced disruption to lessons.
- There is also a greater appreciation of the environment, especially among the increased numbers of students involved with courses linked to the rural dimension. The students have learned to love the land more and there is much greater respect for the environment with little litter and no damage evident.
- Students have pride in their identity and the heritage of the mining communities into which most were born. They are proud of the area they live in and are increasingly involved in working with the community to improve their local environment and the quality of life.
- Adults living in the vicinity of both schools are very positive about the students' public spiritedness as well as the projects and improvements they are involved in. The sale of school grown produce at Chester-le-Street Farmer's market, the community allotments scheme as well as the landscaping and planting schemes in elderly residents' homes are commented on very positively.
- There is a strong care agenda on both school sites with students with physical and learning difficulties particularly well catered for. Care for animals and the environment is also reflected in very positive attitudes.

Quality of teaching and learning of ESD

- The quality of teaching and learning about sustainability is good. Students enjoy the increasing opportunities being offered by more subjects to learn about sustainability in a practical way in their lessons. For example, in mathematics students calculate their carbon footprints and are able to determine how this can be reduced. They also learn to draw plans and measure gardens. Students refer to this positively as 'real learning' and 'enjoyable and relevant learning'.

- A greater range of teaching and learning approaches is being utilised in lessons linked to sustainability. There is a greater emphasis on discussion and listening as well as the formulation of opinions and more creative thinking. Students have also identified that in many lessons linked to sustainability there has been a change from teacher dominated to pupil orientated activities. There is clear evidence for more active participation.
- Both schools provide a good learning context in which pupils can study about the need to lead sustainable lives. Students are encouraged to address and discuss real issues and to offer solutions to improve the local community. Both schools are full of 'little actions' which cumulatively have a 'lot of meaning' and are making a difference to student's own lives and that of their local community.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the ESD curriculum is good overall.

- There is good evidence that sustainability is being increasingly well promoted through the curriculum, notably through the humanities and science.
- Other subjects are also beginning to use sustainability as a context for learning in their discipline. In art, for example, there is frequent use made of recycled products and the newly developed construction courses rely on donated or recycled waste paint
- The curriculum is very inclusive and fit for purpose. There is a broad range of courses available to all students which allow them to develop particular strengths and skills. There is a strong focus on practical learning and a greater use of the outdoor environment.
- Promotion for the rural dimension is well supported by the school farm and extensive horticultural area on the Fyndoune site. This supports the development of practical and life skills well. Students learn to care for animals and their environment as well as being given the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial and personal skills by running stalls at the fortnightly Farmer's market.
- Through teaching in citizenship and the humanities there is a greater understanding of diversity but this remains an area that is still relatively underdeveloped.
- The school has several established links with a number of countries. Although these raise the profile of the global dimension and raise awareness of distant places and cultures they are not yet impacting on the learning of the majority of students other than those directly involved. Insufficient use is being made of these links to impact on learning.
- Enrichment activities linked to community improvement are a strength of provision. Initiatives such as the gardening project are making a real difference to the quality of life in the local community.

Leadership and management of ESD

Leadership and management of ESD are good with community liaison an outstanding aspect.

- There is an ongoing and a clear desire and commitment from senior managers in both schools to use sustainability as a cornerstone of development. Both specialisms support sustainability well.
- The appointment of a senior member of staff to lead and manage sustainability across the two sites reflects the investment and commitment towards ensuring that both schools become sustainable schools.
- Both schools are working hard to become real 'hubs' of their communities. The facilities on the Durham Community Business College, such as the crèche, the learning centre and wide range of sports facilities are being used well as part of extended provision by adults and students alike.
- Fyndoune's acquisition of Humanities Specialist status with a rural dimension has raised the profile of sustainability in the eyes of the students and the wider school community.
- The schools work very well with a number of agencies and community groups to support developments in both schools and in the wider community.
- Student voice continues to develop and support the sustainability agenda well. There is now one council for the two schools and this encourages joint action on a number of areas. There is clear structure and shared responsibility that support a number of creative initiatives.
- The widespread involvement of many students on various council action groups and sub-committees highlights the inclusivity of student participation. This devolved structure enables a greater number of students to pursue specific interests.
- Unlike previous visits, there is now good evidence for the greater involvement of boys in both decision making and participation in many of the sustainability focused initiatives.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to harness the energies of the students into greater community involvement and into further improving the quality of life in their locality
- developing the farm, gardens and school grounds as a centrepiece for promoting sustainability and the rural agenda
- utilising the links with schools abroad more effectively to develop the global dimension and embed learning about the wider world and cultural diversity more firmly into the curriculum
- consolidating activities and planning to embed learning about sustainability across all subjects in the curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop sustainability throughout 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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools
Specialist Adviser for Geography and ESD