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10 February 2009

Ms C Bullock
Principal
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Dear Ms Bullock

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you very much for your co-operation and facilitation and that of your staff during my survey discussions on 9 February 2009 to look at success factors in promoting equality, improving the outcomes for learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and for learners previously not in employment, education or training.

The discussions 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 discussions with college staff and scrutiny of documentation.

The quality of provision to promote equalities for learners previously not in employment, education or training, for those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is outstanding.

Features of good practice and success factors

Very high success rates by learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds

Success rates across the college are very high and rising annually to 89% in 2007/8. Most learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have success rates on a par with the rest of the college, while some, particularly Indian, Bangladeshi and Chinese learners, have considerably higher levels of success. Rates for young black learners aged 16 to 18 also rose significantly in 2007/08 to 91% and those for black males over 19 have increased

considerably. Progression to other college courses and into employment is excellent.

Extremely successful strategies to engage and retain disaffected learners

The college is deeply and vigorously committed to widening participation. It uses its very strong partnerships with community groups and with the local children and young people's services to engage about 150 learners previously not involved in education, employment or training (NEET). These include young people with severe behavioural and attendance problems, teenage mothers, young Somali women, statemented learners permanently excluded from school, learners with mental health conditions, people with disabilities and learning difficulties. Some 550 learners aged 14 to 16 attend college courses as part of their school programmes. The college has developed a range of extremely successful strategies to work with previously disengaged learners. These include targeted marketing, strong referral relationships, early identification of young learners at risk, relocation of courses, alterations to the curriculum, employment of specialist teachers with youth work backgrounds and provision of extensive support. Senior staff are proactive in seeking additional funding for pilot projects to develop new approaches which are subsequently built into whole college practice.

Outstanding teaching and learning which promotes equality and diversity through learning

The college has dedicated considerable resources to improving teaching and learning. Advanced practitioners support teachers in their curriculum areas and carry out observations in curriculum areas other than their own to ensure greater objectivity. Standards are set very high and what is required is made transparent. Teachers often request a non graded observation to get advice and use peer observation to extend skills. What the college terms "articulated differentiation" has to be detailed in learner profiles and lesson plans and clearly observable in lessons to gain a grade 2. The manager for equality and diversity trains and updates not just observers but all staff. Observers expect to see the active use of the curriculum to extend learners' understanding of diversity. Teachers are required to confront directly any discriminatory behaviour. Grades are rigorously monitored both by college managers and by the college's external peer review group. In 2007/08, 96% of lessons observed were graded good or better with 23% graded outstanding.

Outstanding support for learners

The college offers extensive support to learners including mentors (day and evening), learning coaches, learning support assistants for physical and learning disabilities, skills for life lecturers for embedded literacy, numeracy and ESOL, specialist support staff for learners with autistic spectrum conditions or teenage mothers, mental health support from the equality and diversity manager. The college has very good links with external counselling

and psychological services and Connexions. Advice and guidance is excellent. It identifies before enrolment those learners at risk of withdrawing and sets up immediate support arrangements, including early familiarisation visits. The success rates of mentees equal the very high success rate for other learners. The curriculum is very responsive to the needs of newer groups of learners. Disaffected learners at the college's professionally equipped media centre and studios use mobile technology, video, ipods and other digital devices to record learning. Day lengths are shortened for groups with severe concentration difficulties. Courses are located in community settings to draw in the least engaged learners. A special activity programme meets the needs of learners with behavioural difficulties. Increased work experience opportunities increase the chance of learners with learning difficulties obtaining work on leaving.

Outstanding promotion of equality and diversity by senior managers and governors

Governors and managers lead the college in a powerful commitment to equality and diversity. Managers analyse data closely and respond quickly to trends. Governors receive a diversity report on success rates and require detailed action plans to address any areas for development. The equality and diversity manager trains all staff in equality and diversity as well as local employers in issues round equalities' legislation. The college has built strong community and business partnerships. Project funding is imaginatively used to pilot new responses to local challenges. Early interventions in partnership with schools and Connexions has targeted school students at risk as early as year 9 with summer activities to raise their awareness. The proportion of NEET learners locally has dropped to 3.2%.

Areas for development

The college has identified a strategic target to increase the proportion of staff from black and minority ethnic groups and of disabled staff

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in the college.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local LSC and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely,

Pippa Wainwright
Additional inspector