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Mr A Basi
Principal
Walsall College
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Dear Mr Basi

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff during my visit on 26 January 2009 to look at success factors in promoting equality, improving the outcomes for learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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 college staff, meetings with students and scrutiny of documentation

The quality of provision to promote equalities for students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and for people with learning difficulties and disabilities is outstanding.

Features of good practice and success factors

High participation and increasingly equal success rates

As a result of positive actions by the college within the community, the percentage participation of learners from black and minority ethnic groups is very high at 32% compared with the borough profile of 14%. The proportion of learners from disadvantaged wards has increased from 52% to 57% since 2005/06. Following actions to improve performance for targeted groups, male and female success rates are equally high at 79%. Black and minority ethnic group learners overall achieve almost the same high success rates at 78% as white learners at 79%. Learners from widening participation areas achieve the same high success rates at 79% as learners

not from disadvantaged areas who achieve rates of 78%. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also have success rates on a par with their peers without disabilities at around 80%.

The strong promotion of equality and diversity by senior management and governors

Governors provide strong support for senior managers in their strategic direction of the development of equality and diversity. The college has excellent role models of leadership in the principal and senior management team. Over a third of managers at this level are from black or minority ethnic groups. The monitoring of equality and diversity is excellent. Each college school completes a dedicated equality and diversity self assessment report annually, which feeds into an annual review and action plan. Managers at all levels make very good use of equalities data to analyse trends in recruitment and success rates and to monitor improvements. New groups such as underachieving young white men and travellers are identified and planned for. The college is energetic in identifying project funding to develop equality and diversity and embeds successful outcomes from projects into continuing practice. Partnership working is excellent. Managers have developed strong collaborative relations with schools, the local education authority, the regional LSC, universities and a very wide range of community groups. Excellent partnerships forged with a range of local, national and multi-national businesses have created "academies" which give access to high quality training environments and sponsorship.

Very effective curriculum development to meet targeted learners' needs

The college undertook a radical restructuring of its curriculum in response to unsatisfactory success rates on academic courses and the perception that potential learners in the college's target groups were not attracted by the existing curriculum. A very strong vocational focus now addresses the needs of the high percentage of unemployed young learners in Walsall. Live work opportunities and work experience are built into hair and beauty, business and management, and supported learning courses. Supported learning alone, as a result of good partnership work with employers, has about 50 learners with learning difficulties or disabilities in work experience. Greatly improved relations have led to the beginnings of delivery by the college of vocational courses in schools. One school with very low numbers moving into further education now has large numbers of students eager to attend hair and beauty courses in a newly built salon at their school. Flexible modes of delivery are available for individual learners in young mothers groups and learners needing extended compassionate or sick leave, by using distance learning via the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support an individual action plan during unavoidable absences. The VLE is also used increasingly by learners with autistic spectrum conditions to submit work and receive feedback when learners experience face to face contacts as too difficult. Schemes of work are planned around the annual cultural calendar.

Very effective use of specialist support to raise success levels

The college has one of the largest GFE provisions in the country for Deaf learners. Interpreters of British Sign Language qualified to level 3 or 4, support deaf learners on courses and in work experience. One dyslexia specialist is qualified to undertake full assessments including for examination purposes. Peer mentors trained under an innovative college project support younger learners. Successful mentors are now beginning to train school pupils in the same mentoring skills. African Caribbean learners in danger of withdrawing from college are referred to Black Sisters advocacy project. Early identification of and provision for support needs ensures learners participate fully in learning from the start of their programmes. Course leaders are notified well in advance of learners with such needs and have time to get informed advice on teaching strategies and software use. A highly inclusive atmosphere based on a culture of respect leads to students' empowerment. The student union is very active and leads on anti-bullying strategies. A student conference is well attended and thoughtful. One of its roles is to validate the SAR. Two student representatives on the governing body receive useful support in preparing for meetings and are able to participate effectively.

Areas for development

Raise success rates for specific groups of learners from black and minority ethnic groups

Within the general rise in success rates for all black and minority ethnic groups, the college has identified lower success rates for young men defining themselves as Black Caribbean, Black Other, Pakistani and Mixed Race. The college has also recognised that as in most other areas, too few young black learners join apprenticeships.

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