

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Ms A Khemka
Principal and Chief Executive
West Nottinghamshire College
Derby Road
Mansfield
NG18 5BH

Dear Ms Khemka

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 28 January 2009 to look at success factors in promoting equality, improving the outcomes for learners previously not in employment, education or training and for those 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 learners previously not in employment, education or training and for people with learning difficulties and disabilities is outstanding.

Features of good practice and success factors

Highly accessible curriculum offer

In an area of low educational and employment aspiration, the college is outstandingly successful at attracting learners with a curriculum imaginatively designed to meet their needs. The college makes excellent provision for 120 learners who have not achieved at school in a dedicated centre, Ashfield College. Nearly 600 learners aged 14 to 16, including many from special schools, attend part-time courses at the college. A large number of these progress to full-time programmes at the college. The curriculum provides a strong focus on practical contexts for learning and includes real working environments such as retail outlets, catering services, salons, workshops and design studios. In hospitality, learners at levels from

1 to 3 work very effectively alongside each other, with higher level students providing role models and mentoring for newer learners. Specialist provision for large numbers of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities makes the college particularly accessible both in Bay6, a dedicated centre, and on main sites. These learners are thoroughly integrated into college life.

Outstanding support for learners

Learner coaches with youth work backgrounds work closely with individuals at risk of withdrawing, to keep them on track. These staff also organise an exciting enrichment programme and a buddying scheme. Five specialist teams composed of 75 highly qualified staff provide support for learners with hearing impairments, visual impairments, dyslexia, autistic spectrum conditions, behavioural difficulties, and physical disabilities. The specialist teams devise successful classroom strategies for designated learners with teachers. They also run more general awareness training for college schools of learning, support staff and community partners such as prison teaching staff. Over 100 staff in vocational areas are qualified at level 2 in supporting learners with dyslexia. The Exceptional Needs panel, which includes an external specialist advisor, meets to consider what changes would make it possible for an individual learner with very high support needs to attend college. The college is skilled at identifying invisibly excluded groups such as people with unspent convictions and making changes to ensure access. Nearly 100 such learners are now attending college. A new post dedicated to supporting ex and current offenders, looked after children, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees is evidence of the college's commitment to reducing exclusion. Practical support arrangements with housing, finance, childcare, transport and work experience are excellent.

Strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning to promote equality

The college sees excellent teaching and learning as a key contributory factor in promoting equality through properly meeting the individual needs of learners. It devotes considerable resources to improving teaching and learning. A team of learning consultants works with college 'schools' to support new staff in developing personalised learning. All new staff, however experienced elsewhere, are entitled to three months support from their learning consultant and must attend two workshops on differentiation. Classroom observations focus on equality and diversity. Peer observations, mentoring, support and coaching with the same focus have all helped to increase the proportion of internally awarded outstanding grades. Diversity is built into the curriculum with learning activities on, for example, mental health week, international women's day or Chinese New Year. Teachers adapt their schemes of work to address potential discrimination. They build in visits to and from black and minority ethnic community groups to compensate for most learners' lack of experience of mixed communities arising from living in a predominantly white area. Learning materials and internal verification processes are scrutinised for their equalities focus.

Outstanding leadership on equality and diversity by senior management

The principal and senior executive team lead a systematic whole college approach to equality and diversity, supported by a governors committee and a steering group which strongly promotes college values. In the light of these, senior staff have updated the human resources strategy and work to a robust equality and diversity scheme that is reviewed and measured for progress and impact. All college schools and support areas carry out rigorous equality reviews and self assessments. Equalities issues are central to learner and staff surveys. The learner voice strategy has created a genuine sense of empowerment among learners along with the development of the students union and the student council. Very well designed training on equality and diversity is mandatory for all staff. Managers make good use of data to support equalities judgements and to inform quality improvement plans. College staff work very effectively with a local specialist institution for learners with autistic spectrum conditions.

Areas for development

Improve retention by learners over 19 from black and minority ethnic groups

The college has identified retention for these groups at 81% as 8% below that of white groups. Achievement is 2% below. The college has noted contributory factors in the equality and diversity student monitoring report.

Address declining success rates among younger male learners and learners with disabilities

The college recognises that the decline in success rates, however small, is unacceptable when part of a three year pattern. It has identified possible contributory factors.

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
Associate inspector