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11 December 2009

Ms Catherine Jenkinson-Dix  
City of Ely Community College  
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Dear Ms Jenkinson-Dix

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college with Michael Stanton, additional inspector, on 10 December 2009.

As a result of the inspection on 20-21 November 2008, the college was asked to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning so that standards rise, develop the role of middle leaders in bringing about further improvement and provide them with more frequent monitoring and support, improve the accuracy of self-evaluation and, in the sixth form, ensure that attendance is accurately monitored each day.

Since that inspection there have been two significant changes in middle and senior leadership. In February 2009 a new head of English joined the college, and in April 2009 the new principal took up her post with the acting principal reverting to his former role of vice-principal.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college has made inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. The college's arrangements for safeguarding students were also scrutinised during the inspection and found to meet all current requirements.

The new principal has a clear understanding of the issues that the college faces, including the need to hold middle leaders to account more effectively for the performance of their subject areas. She has not hesitated to seek advice and call in external support, including in English and mathematics. The college has recently been designated as a 'gaining ground' school. However, the effectiveness of this support has yet to be realised through improved teaching or improved outcomes for students. There is some emerging potential amongst middle and senior leaders, as seen by the quality of discussion following our four joint lesson observations. However, aspects of self-evaluation at all levels of management, including teacher assessments, views of the quality of teaching and learning and governors'



perspectives, present an over-generous view of the college's performance. The fall in the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2009, declining attendance, and continued inconsistencies in teaching do not support the college's view that there is now good capacity for further improvement.

Although the headline 5A\*-C pass rate improved, the 2009 examination results showed a decline in standards, compared to those of 2008. The proportion of students achieving five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was below the national figure and the college's target although these students' attainment was broadly average when they joined the college. Progress was slow in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Subject leaders have been called to account for these results and required to produce detailed analyses of students' performance. There are now weekly meetings between middle leaders and their line managers, but these remain too informal with insufficiently clear action points and deadlines for further improvement. The principal recognises that expectations have been set too low and that data has not been used effectively to monitor progress and set ambitious targets for higher standards. Learning in three of the four lessons observed during my visit revealed a similar lack of urgency and ambition, where students were allowed to drift through activities without being challenged to achieve higher standards or complete work at a good pace. The quality and consistency of teaching has not improved sufficiently since the last inspection.

Satisfactory improvements have been made to systems for monitoring sixth form attendance through checks in lessons, signing in and out at reception, and the use of new biometric registration software. However these more effective systems reveal that sixth form attendance is low, with students missing one in every five sessions. Although attendance is broadly average in the main school as a whole, it is below average in Year 11, and the proportion of students who are persistently absent is too high. Significantly improving attendance in all year groups is a priority before the next inspection.

Specialist status in business and enterprise has brought increased curriculum opportunities throughout the college, including in Key Stage 3. In addition, community links have helped to develop the enterprise skills of local primary schools pupils. However, achievement in examination courses is inconsistent, with poor results in GCSE business studies. The college has identified the reasons for this outcome, including weaker aspects of teaching that did not relate students' learning to real life business situations. Specialist college targets were not met in business studies or mathematics in 2009.

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

Mark Phillips  
Her Majesty's Inspector