

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

1 October 2009

Mrs Mirjam Bühler-Willey
Headteacher
High Tunstall College of Science
Elwick Road
Hartlepool
County Durham
TS26 0LQ

Dear Mrs Bühler-Willey

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Mr Dower and I inspected your college on 30 September 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. I would also like to offer my thanks to the students who spoke to us during the inspection.

The difficulties referred to in the last inspection report have been resolved. Faculties are now fully staffed, with the exception of the mathematics faculty where there is one long-term absence. The senior management team has stabilised and developed further through the addition of two temporarily-funded assistant headteachers and a change in roles and responsibilities; closely aligned to the strengths of the team. Since the closure of a local secondary school, High Tunstall now receives students from a wider area of Hartlepool.

As a result of the inspection on 24 to 25 September 2008, the college was asked to improve achievement for more able students through greater expectation and challenge in lessons, and to improve the consistency and quality of feedback to students, including marking. They were also asked to engage more effectively with parents and carers and improve leadership and management to ensure that senior leaders work together more effectively.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college has made

satisfactory progress in making improvements.

and

satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment at Key Stage 4 improved significantly in 2009, following a dip in 2008. Provisional examination results indicate the college has attained the highest-ever proportion of students gaining five GCSEs grades A to C, and when including English and mathematics. A high proportion of students gained A* or A grades in history, geography, physical education and the three specialist-college science subjects. Indeed, the college's specialist status in science continues to impact positively on its work; standards are high, good practice in faculties is shared across the school and all targets are met or exceeded.

College assessment information indicates students in all year groups are making generally good and sometimes very good progress during the year. However, the progress of more able students in lessons observed during the inspection is more variable and therefore satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge and use of questioning helps to challenge students thinking and moves them on quickly in their learning. Assessment information is used to make sure lessons are planned to challenge all, including the most able, to achieve their best. This is not always the case and in more satisfactory lessons all students tackle the same work so opportunities to challenge and stretch higher ability students are more limited. Marking and feedback to students is improving due to senior leaders' focus on this and they are taking concerted action this year to ensure remaining inconsistencies in marking, feedback and challenge to more able students in faculties and classes are eradicated.

Senior leaders and governors are developing a range of strategies to improve communications with parents and carers and some are beginning to bear fruit. For example, following parental concerns, senior leaders have re-instigated parent evenings, developed Year 10 information evenings and Year 9 option evenings. Parent feedback has been positive. The development of a parent web-based portal is nearly complete with the aim of providing an added opportunity for parents to be more involved in their children's learning.

The leadership team have worked well over the past year to become a coherent and homogenous team. They have developed a clear, focused cycle of monitoring and review of the work of the college and the progress of students. This process now provides a tight link to the performance management of staff and the accountability of all in the college's improvement. Faculty leaders and middle managers have continued to develop their leadership roles effectively. They believe there is a far greater sense of common purpose across the college and say they are moving forward successfully. Senior leaders cite the good improvement in standards as an example of the impact of their work. Senior leaders' evaluation of their current work is insightful and honest. However more needs to be done to make sure the college

development plan pinpoints exactly what impact the actions identified for improvement will make; for example exactly what difference the actions identified to ensure greater challenge in lessons will make to the more able.

The college looks outside its boundary to secure support that will promote improvement internally and locally. For example, working with external partners to improve teachers' understanding of assessment and value added data. They work closely with the community of secondary schools in Hartlepool and the local authority; sharing good practice and professional development training.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your college. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector