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3 December 2009

Mr I Wilkinson  
Headteacher  
George Stephenson Community High School  
Southgate  
Killingworth  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
NE12 6SA

Dear Mr Wilkinson

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: girls' and young women's achievement

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 19 November 2009 to look at the causes of girls' and young women's underachievement and long-term economic well-being and the good practice that effectively supports them.

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 we used to inform the judgements included: discussions with senior leaders, staff and the school's Connexions Adviser; observation of parts of two lessons; discussions with three groups of girls and young women; feedback from local employers; and school documentation.

Overall, your work on promoting the achievement of girls and young women, and in developing their future economic well-being, is satisfactory. The school has successfully improved overall achievement through regular progress monitoring and an integrated approach to academic and personal guidance. However, opportunities to develop girls' and young women's knowledge and awareness of wider career options through careers education, work experience and the involvement of employers are underdeveloped. Students follow stereotypical courses, work experience and career choices as there is limited coordinated provision to challenge traditional options.

Features of effective practice

- Attendance has improved and persistent absence significantly reduced through focused interventions and regular monitoring. This is supporting improvements in learning and progress.

- The sixth form is effective in raising the aspirations of young women. As a result, they are confident about their career paths; the majority are inspired by their teacher to progress to university.
- The Young Apprenticeship programme enables a small group of young women to benefit from enhanced work experience across Key Stage 4. This provides experience and insights of varied, and often non-stereotypical working environments.
- The Rocket City and Formula 1 projects offer good extra-curricular opportunities for a few girls in Years 8 and 9 to become involved in technology and engineering.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the coordination of careers and work-related learning; business and enterprise; work experience; and specialist adviser input to provide girls and young women with the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to raise their aspirations and to challenge gender stereotypes
- extending opportunities for students to experience business and enterprise activities to broaden their knowledge of work, improve financial awareness, and to support a wider choice of career options
- making use of the Quality Standards for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance to support a strategic approach for tackling gender stereotypes in course, work experience and career choices.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to promote achievement and develop the economic well-being of girls and young women in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić  
Her Majesty's Inspector