

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr M Chivers and Ms R Sheikh
Principals
Ernest Bevin College
Beechcroft Road
Tooting
London
SW17 7DF

Dear Mr Chivers and Ms Sheikh

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: good practice in literacy

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 4 and 5 November 2009 to look at work in literacy.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included discussions with senior leaders and middle managers. I also visited parts of six lessons, spoke to students and looked at documents including school data and students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The proportion of students on free school meals who attain five good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is above the average achieved by all students nationally. There is very little difference in the college between the attainment and achievement of students on free school meals and those who are not. Both groups do very well.
- Leaders and managers have a strong commitment to all students doing well. There is no stigma attached to free school meals. For example, the move to a cashless dinner system has meant that these students are not distinguishable.
- The school has successfully reduced the proportion of fixed-term exclusions through effective sanctions, such as the referral room and use of rewards, to motivate students. The learning support centre is used well to encourage the re-integration of students by developing their skills of

cooperation and teamwork. The proportion of students on free school meals who are excluded more than once is very low.

- Former students, some of whom acknowledged that they did not behave well when they were younger, have returned as role-models to support younger students, taking responsibilities such as coaching, learning support, and leading after-school activities.
- Students acknowledge the consistent approach of teachers towards them; they respond well to the variety of engaging activities and the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills through discussion and group work.
- Students report that teachers demonstrate their belief in them through the way they speak to them in class and provide positive written feedback on their work. The view of students is that if the school believes in them they will go far.
- Students know how well they are doing and are familiar with grade criteria for their coursework marks; they also know what their targets are to improve their work. Assessment is used well by teachers to ensure that work set is pitched at the appropriate level of challenge.
- Teachers of other subjects use key words well in lessons. They strike a good balance between teaching subject knowledge and key literacy skills. Information and communication technology is also used well to support students' learning during, and out of, lesson time.
- The library is an important resource to support students' learning and engage students with reading. Tutor time is used well to develop literacy, for example by holding registration time in the library for groups of students.
- All of the tutors in each year group belong to the same faculty. This ensures that teachers in that subject get to know one year group very well and this benefits the attainment in that subject. Wherever possible, tutors stay with their groups for five years.
- Small groups of students who are significantly below the expected level of reading for their age benefit from a synthetic phonics programme that enables them to make rapid progress.
- Students throughout the college benefit from additional curriculum time for English. An increasing proportion of students are entered early for English language in November of Year 11. Students are able to focus fully on English literature for the summer examination or retake their language examination in the summer to improve their grade.
- The college's sports specialism has successfully engaged students at risk of disengaging. For some students, the out-of-hours sports has re-engaged them with their learning and improved their attendance. Vocational courses and more flexible ways of learning, such as modular science, engage students in their learning.

Areas for development

- Ensure that a greater proportion of students achieve the highest possible grades in English language.
- Continue to work closely with the parents of the small minority of students whose irregular attendance means they do not do as well as expected.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop literacy in your school.

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

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector