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Mrs J Pearson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pearson

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme – raising aspirations and achievement: the power of partnership

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25 November 2009 to look at your partnerships with business.

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 included scrutiny of documentation, three observations and discussions with you, other staff, students and business partners.

Features of good practice observed

- Specialism in business and enterprise and partnerships with business are integral to students' learning and achievement across the curriculum. Your focus on enterprise skills is helping students to learn independently and improve their examination grades. As a result, a higher number of students are entering further and higher education.
- You ensure the sustainability of your business links by dedicating time and resources to establishing strong partnerships. An important part of this is forward planning with business partners so that projects sit coherently within the curriculum and link with the school improvement planning process.
- The benefits of your business partnerships are shared with other schools in the locality, for example, through good outreach work with primary schools.
- Business partnerships and enterprise activities make an important contribution to students' personal development and enjoyment of school.

There are excellent opportunities for students to develop communication, presentation, team-building and leadership skills. As a result, students develop into confident individuals with a desire to make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. The work of the student business ambassadors is a good example of this.

- Students benefit from very good work-related learning opportunities. Business partners are instrumental in offering work-placements, mentoring students and involving them in business challenges that have real meaning in the world of work.
- The effective use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning is at the heart of the success of business-related courses and the business challenges that are delivered jointly with business partners. Good access to computers helps to engage students and is raising the standard of their work across the curriculum.
- The appointment of a community manager, a non-teaching leadership role, with responsibility for maintaining and developing business links has been critical to the success and sustainability of partnerships.
- Business partners greatly value their connection with the school and the continuity afforded by the community manager. They see students' creativity as an asset that they want to invest in. In addition, their employees develop their interpersonal skills and understanding of the world of education.
- The range of business partners and specialism in business and enterprise gives breadth and richness to the curriculum. The choice of courses available to students has been significantly increased. The school has been bold in developing a curriculum that meets the needs of students and motivates them.
- Business partnerships have helped to empower students by developing their ability to express themselves in a range of contexts and participate in decision-making. These skills are clearly evident in the good contribution that students make to the continuous improvement of the school.
- Your work with business partners is influential in extending teaching methods and expertise. Teachers have grown into skilled coaches and facilitators as they support students in becoming independent learners. Assessment practice has also improved with more opportunities for students to evaluate their own and each other's work.
- Very good professional development opportunities increase staff skills and knowledge of business and enterprise and make them aware of how different curriculum areas capitalise on the school's business links. The school rightly wishes to build on this work by developing the connections between its three specialisms.

Area for development, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to build links between the school's three specialisms of business and enterprise, applied learning and gifted and talented to further extend students' learning experiences and life opportunities.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop partnerships in support of school improvement.

As I explained previously, 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

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector