

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 Ramsey
Headteacher
The Towers School
Faversham Road
Kennington
Ashford
TN24 9AL

Dear Mr Ramsey

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 2 December 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; four observations of teaching and learning in vocational and business-related courses; a visit to the on-site nursery; discussions with you, other staff and students; and telephone conversations with business partners and a representative from the local authority.

Features of good practice

- The school is outward looking and has established an impressive portfolio of business partnerships to promote students' learning and economic well-being. The economic well-being of the wider community is also supported by the school's focus on working with industry and business links to tackle shortages in skills in the locality. In addition, local people benefit from access to training and facilities provided by the school.
- Enterprise permeates the life of the school. You have taken a leading role in building this vision, securing resources and supporting the professional development of staff. Senior leadership has been structured effectively to ensure the sustainability of business partnerships and increase their impact on improving outcomes for students.

- Business partnerships and the school's specialism in business and enterprise have been powerful in shaping a curriculum that gives students choice and flexibility. The consequent personalisation of the curriculum has increased students' motivation and engagement with learning. This is reflected in improving attendance and no permanent exclusions in the last five years. Students enjoy and achieve well in a good range of vocational and business-related subjects. A high proportion of Year 11 students join the sixth form where courses at levels 2 and 3 are successful in helping students to enter the next phase of education, employment or training at a higher stage.
- There are excellent opportunities for students to develop their skills for working life. The school, in partnership with the local authority, has been creative in simulating working environments in health and beauty, construction, and hospitality and catering which give students a realistic experience of the challenges of working in these industries.
- Business partnerships and enterprise activities contribute very well to students' personal development. A culture of problem-solving, creativity and risk-taking encourages students to develop leadership and communication skills, and independence in their learning.
- The Interact programme gives students excellent opportunities to apply their entrepreneurial skills to making a positive contribution to local and international projects through organising fundraising events.
- Business partnerships have helped to empower students by developing their decision-making skills and ability to express themselves in different contexts. These skills are evident in the good contribution students make to the improvement of the school.
- Specialism and business partnerships are influential in extending teaching methods and expertise. A number of subjects and vocational courses are timetabled for a full day each week. Students and staff value the continuity of learning and the scope to engage with 'real-life' purposeful activities this affords. The school is rightly considering how they can make learning more purposeful and authentic in other curriculum areas.
- The employment of staff from industry to deliver vocational courses has been highly beneficial. Students value their first-hand experience and very clear advice about the specific expectations within industries. In addition, the excellent links these staff have built with local employers expands opportunities for students to gain relevant work experience tailored to their needs.
- The effective use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning has been central to the success of business-related courses and cross-curricular enterprise challenges. Good access to computers is helping students to raise the standard of their work.
- Business partners make a valuable contribution to effective careers guidance through mentoring individual students, talking to groups about the world of work and offering work-placements.

- Business partners are clear that their links with the school are mutually beneficial. They value the quality of the relationships that have been established and the creativity that students offer to their businesses. In return, business employees develop their understanding of the education system and their interpersonal skills. Some participate in the training courses offered by the school and, in so doing, demonstrate the importance of life-long learning to students.
- A significant number of governors have a background in business and industry. This increases the effectiveness of governance in promoting and challenging the impact of business partnerships on school improvement.

Area for development

- Extend the opportunities for students to learn in real-life, purposeful contexts to more areas of the curriculum.

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