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Mr D Seddon  
Headteacher  
Baxter College  
Habberley Road  
Kidderminster  
DY11 5PQ

Dear Mr Seddon,

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 19 and 20 January 2010 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 of teaching and learning in vocational, enterprise, business-related courses and mathematics; and discussions with you, staff, students, governors, a business partner and representatives from community groups and other schools.

Features of effective practice

- Your school works closely and successfully with a very wide range of local businesses and other schools. The development of so many vocational courses, as a result of these links, is ensuring that students of all abilities can follow courses in which they can succeed. You believe the close match between the needs of students and the curriculum contributes powerfully to rising standards. In addition, specialism in business and enterprise is resulting in more students staying on into the sixth form. You are right in wanting to evaluate the impact of your links with business more formally.
- Business links have encouraged staff to be more creative and try new ways of teaching to enthuse students and open their eyes to wider possibilities. Teachers increasingly relate learning in the classroom to real-life situations, skilfully presenting challenges at the right level so that all

students can succeed. All students are trained to take responsibility for their own learning. This was evident in the lessons I observed.

- Enterprise activities are built into subject planning. The annual enterprise week provides exciting challenges and opportunities for students to shine in different ways. Local businesses play a major role in judging the outcomes of the various activities.
- Your staff are enterprising in their constant search for challenges. A recent example was entering a team of students for a competition run by the British Interactive Media Association. The students put forward a plan to develop Baxter TV – a tv station run by the school for students, parents and the wider community along the lines of Sky Sports News. They did not win the competition but they did receive an invitation to visit Sky Arts in London and have since won a bid from Creative partnerships to set up this project.
- The portfolio produced by a group of students involved in the Building Schools for the Future project is an impressive testament to the value of students working with professionals. Students consider that 'this was a wonderful opportunity to work with real professionals'. They felt it was a 'life experience' rather than a 'school experience'.
- Students are eloquent in their support and appreciation of what the school has to offer and the benefits of business partnerships in providing wider opportunities. They say that partnerships with business have raised the profile of their school and opened doors for them.
- As a result of your wide range of business partnerships, the quality of work-experience available to students is excellent. A typical student comment was, 'Getting a work-placement has helped me to improve my attendance and understand what employers want.'
- Students involved in Young Chamber and Young Enterprise groups have benefited enormously from the expertise of various professionals in setting up and managing companies effectively. Currently there are students manufacturing decorative glassware in partnership with a local glass company, and others developing a Baxter radio podcast working with local primary schools.
- Investment in information and communication technology has brought improvements to the learning experiences of all students. The establishment of a learning platform is motivating students and informing parents more effectively about what is happening in school.
- An outstanding example of partnership working is seen in the school's membership of the ContinU Trust. This involves seven high schools, two special schools, Barnardo's, Kidderminster College, the Universities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton and the local authority. This Trust offers 11 Diplomas and greatly increases students' access to vocational opportunities and work-related learning. In addition, your work with your Pyramid feeder schools and a local special school is ensuring a consistent and successful approach to raising attendance across the area.

- Governors are very supportive of the school, holding it to account and analysing closely the effectiveness of all actions taken. Effective business partnerships and partnerships with other schools have played an important part in improving the school and the wider community.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- further strengthening procedures to evaluate the impact of partnerships on improved outcomes for students.

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

Judith Straw  
Additional Inspector