

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 I Knight
Headteacher
Astley Community High School
Elsdon Avenue
Seaton Delaval
Whitely Bay
NE25 0BP

Dear Mr Knight

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the federation staff, your staff and students, during my visit on 19 and 20 January 2010 to look at your partnerships with schools.

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: visits to the two middle schools in the federation; scrutiny of documentation; observation of lessons; and discussions with senior leaders, staff, governors, students and the Extended Schools Coordinator for the Seaton Valley Learning Partnership.

Features of effective practice

- Thoughtful, proactive and determined leadership underpin the successful creation of the federation. Close, collaborative working in an equal partnership lies at the heart of the shared vision and ethos of the federation. Senior leaders work energetically to raise aspirations and the self-esteem of young people and families. Early evidence points to rising aspirations and confidence, improving achievement and increased family participation in learning. However, evaluation of the impact of the federation on improving the outcomes for students requires further development.
- Governance and senior leadership capacity have been strengthened by the development of consistent and cohesive policies and management systems across the federation.

- The federation is outward looking and has been successful in securing specialist status in mathematics and computing. Although it is too early to demonstrate the impact of the specialism, the federation is already starting to build on effective pilot work in mathematics to boost students' attainment.
- The sharing of information, resources and expertise within the federation enhances the provision for vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Transition between the middle schools and the high school is seamless. Students speak enthusiastically about the benefits of the transition project which is based in the high school and consists of a week-long programme for Year 8 students. As a result, most students face the prospect of their first day at the high school with confidence.
- The federation has provided good staff development opportunities to improve the quality of learning. However, there is still scope to share expertise further.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- systematically evaluating the impact of federation on outcomes for students
- continuing to share good practice within the federation.

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 of the hard federation schools. It will also be available for all three schools for their next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Clive Petts
Additional Inspector