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Mr A Key
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Dear Mr Key

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, students and governors, during my visit on 19 and 20 January 2010 to look at your partnerships with higher education.

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; an observation; and discussions with staff, governors, students and higher education partners.

Features of effective practice

- The wide range of links with higher education makes an outstanding contribution to the quality of information, advice and guidance in the main school and the sixth form, to students' personal development and the increasing number of students progressing to higher education.
- A very well-led and organised programme with Newcastle University provides regular, sustained and effective information, advice and guidance from university-student ambassadors for all sixth-form students preparing to apply for university.
- The 'Aim for College Education' programme with Sheffield and York universities provides all Year 9 students with the opportunity to visit the university and meet students. This effectively raises awareness and aspiration.

- The 'Widening Participation' programmes at Leeds and Sheffield universities and the Aimhigher programmes provide a range of long-term, sustained and well-resourced mentoring and study-skills programmes. These carefully target minority ethnic and White working-class students who have academic potential but whose parents have no experience of higher education. These programmes, which include university-student mentors, have a strong and lasting impact on individual students' personal development, their academic skills and their confidence in applying for university.
- Contributions by particular subject departments in universities impact significantly on aspects of teaching and learning and the curriculum, particularly in the humanities subjects and science.
- 'The Big Think' pilot project run with the Philosophy Department at Leeds University was very successful with a small group of Year 8 students in developing their thinking skills, their creative use of open-ended questions and their self-confidence.
- There is successful partnership between the course leader of the innovative 'History students into schools' module in the history undergraduate course at Leeds University and the subject leader for history at Abbey Grange. She has made a significant contribution to the development and delivery of this popular and challenging module which gives undergraduates a taste of teaching. Students in school benefit from the additional support and expertise provided by history undergraduates. It has led both school and university staff to evaluate and improve the continuity and progression from A level to undergraduate history.
- A-level English study days run at various universities, with the support of a private provider. The lectures are well timed at the beginning of the relevant coursework and are accurately focused on specific learning objectives in A-level language and literature. The expertise of the lecturers and examiners stimulates deeper thinking about language and literature. These events add to students' and teachers' subject knowledge and contribute directly to the good progress students make in A-level English.
- The 'Peace Jam' run by the Peace Studies Department at Bradford University is highly successful in developing students' understanding of global issues and in inspiring them to take responsibility for raising awareness and funds in the school. Year 11 and sixth-form students involved in this programme have developed a clear sense of direction, strong enterprise and leadership skills and increased self-confidence. It also strengthens their commitment to studying humanities subjects.
- The Institute of Physics programme has enabled students to benefit from activities and support by science undergraduates from Leeds and Liverpool universities in lessons and the science club. This contributes to the good take-up of science in the sixth form. The Science Centre at Sheffield Hallam University has provided professional development which has strengthened the teaching of physics by non-specialists.
- The school provides effective professional support and mentoring for trainees from Trinity and All Saints University College and Leeds

Metropolitan University on initial and school-centred teacher training. Undergraduates and teacher trainees working in the school have brought their expertise, skills and up-to-date knowledge to the classroom and have broadened and enriched the curriculum on offer.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- extending the 'Big Think' project to more students or subjects
- using university and examination board expertise to improve outcomes in other sixth-form subjects.

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

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector