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Thursday 27 May 2010

Dr Joe Vitagliano  
Midhurst Rother College  
North Street  
Midhurst  
GU29 9DT

Dear Dr Vitagliano

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Midhurst Rother College

## Introduction

Following my visit with Stephen Long HMI to your academy Midhurst Rother College on 25–26 May 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the work of the college, scrutinised documents and met with students, staff, governors and senior leaders in the school. A range of documentation was scrutinised including policies and school progress tracking information.

## Context

Midhurst Rother College opened in January 2009, it serves a wide area surrounding Midhurst and the Rother valley. There are 907 students on roll with a small but growing sixth form. New accommodation is planned to bring the college onto a single site. A small proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Students are predominantly of White British heritage. There is a slightly higher proportion of students than is found nationally with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Schools have been re-organised in the local area, middle schools have been closed and from September 2009 primary schools took on the responsibility for the education of students until the end of Year 6.



## Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Students' attainment at the start of Year 7 is below the national average overall. Assessment is more accurate and is being used effectively to track the progress of students so the college has a clear picture of performance of all students and groups within it. Students are making increasingly more effective progress as they develop a positive approach to learning and build confidence in their own success. The college's hard work is beginning to compensate for the previous underachievement of students but it is very aware that this process is at an early stage. Boys generally perform less well than girls and this reflects the national trend. Boys generally do not develop independent study skills as effectively as most girls.

## Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students have played a very positive role in improving their progress within the college. They are keen learners and have worked cooperatively with the staff to ensure a notable improvement in classroom behaviour and behaviour around the school. Students are polite and demonstrate mature attitudes, wanting to make the most of opportunities for learning in lessons. It is only when the challenge in lessons is not demanding enough that students' focus diminishes. The students show a high degree of commitment and trust toward the staff in this new college, eager to take on the challenges and contribute to the success of this friendly community.

## The effectiveness of provision

The school leaders are clear about the need to raise the quality of teaching and have been very successful in this through a strategy of effective delegation of responsibilities to leaders at all levels. The best lessons observed were well planned, used a variety of resources well, allowed students to think independently, developing their skills and understanding because of the teachers' good subject knowledge. Teachers use assessment data to track progress against targets and this is increasing the expectations and ensuring the pace of lessons is brisk. Students receive feedback directly from teachers and through clear comments on work, but these are not always consistent. Students are not always aware of how they can make better progress or work more independently. Teachers know students well and end of task assessments are accurate. More use of assessments made during lessons, or sections of work, is needed to inform the opportunities and challenges that should be provided for individual students. Opportunities to develop learning further are therefore lost. When students understand why they are undertaking a task and what it is that they are learning, including specific success criteria, progress is more effective and the key processes understood. Students with special educational needs

are identified and supported by the school with good systems of communication developing to ensure all staff are aware of the individual targets of students.

The curriculum is developing well and clear plans are in place to increasingly meet the needs of students with a wide range of opportunities including vocational courses. Students studying National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Beauty Therapy enjoy the course and are able to gain experience of an operational salon. This ensures that students are confident and are able to make an immediate contribution to the industry when they leave college. The college has systems in place to support students and give clear guidance for careers and future study. Students contribute to assemblies and are active in the wider school community including consultation on the new school buildings.

#### The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal ensures the school has a strong drive for improvement. This is based on giving staff, at all levels, appropriate responsibilities for which they are accountable throughout the organisation. Leaders are approachable and focussed on the hard work needed to ensure the success of the college. There are good monitoring systems for teaching and the college is highly analytical about its practice. In a very short time three schools have come together with a wide range of skills and diverse histories to be one college with clear ambition, a sense of community and students central to its work. Partnerships are developing well to give students access to opportunities beyond the college in Winchester College and Chichester University. The governing body is developing a systematic approach to holding the college to account and ensuring appropriate challenge. This further contributes to the capacity of the college to increase the pace of change and ensure the College meets the needs of the community.

#### External support

The school has worked hard in forging local partnerships and has used a number of external consultants to verify outcomes. The school is well supported by the sponsor organisation ULT but operates with autonomy under the decisive leadership of the Principal.

#### Main Judgements

The college has made good progress towards raising standards.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Build on the best practice in teaching and learning developing it by:
  - ensuring that subject leaders monitor and develop the teaching further within their learning areas
  - developing active learning experiences further and ensure that students are clear about the context for learning and success criteria
  - checking learning is taking place during lesson and ensuring all students are challenged throughout lessons and work more independently.
- Develop students' study skills further to support more independent working.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Scott  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body  
the Academies Group, DCSF [ [Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk) ]

Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - chair of governors
- DCSF - Academies Group [Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)

The letters should also be copied electronically to:

[paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk) - the HMI with national responsibility for academies  
each member of the inspection team,  
the PO for SCC

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

- lead HMI