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Miss M Williams  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Williams

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 10 and 11 February 2010 to look at your partnerships with higher and further 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; two observations; and discussions with staff, students and higher and further education partners at the University of Huddersfield, Leeds University, Sheffield Hallam University and New College Huddersfield.

#### Features of effective practice

- Over the last four years, students' attainment has increased, as has the proportion that stays in education, employment and training. There was also a significant rise in the number of students going to university in 2009.
- Sixth-form students regularly work with students in booster classes. This contributes to their good progress. University students regularly work with students on gifted and talented and Aimhigher study days at university. Both provide younger students with valuable information about subjects and further and higher education. As influential role-models, they inspire students to aspire to sixth form college and university.
- The school's monitoring, target-setting and intervention at Key Stage 4 have a strong focus on the higher grades at GCSE. This promotes aspiration for higher education and the professions. Strong assessment,

guidance and support provide a well-focused framework for students' engagement with university and sixth-form students.

- Students with the potential to go on to higher education, including some who may be held back by social disadvantage, are identified and included in the Aimhigher project. In a Year 9 Aimhigher group on a leisure professions programme, half the students had at least one parent who went to university and half did not. The school has this information. However, at present these data are not used to monitor those students whose parents did not attend university.
- The school provides mixed-age teaching groups for option subjects in Years 9 to 11. This gives students access to a wider range of subjects and higher level courses. Learning by stage not age, and the increased range and flexibility of courses, have implications for planning the transition to post-16 education. For example, following discussion with a sixth-form college, it was decided to introduce a mathematics bridging unit for potential A and A\* students in Year 11, instead of entering them early for GCSE and then taking an AS-level course.
- Curriculum links with post-16 providers are well established in some subject areas. For example, in physical education, sixth-form students on the BTEC National Diploma Sport spend 10 weeks working in the school and learn to lead practice and skill sessions. However, in some subjects, students lack opportunities to gain first-hand understanding of the demands of level 3 work. In addition, some subject leaders miss the opportunity of liaising with post-16 course leaders to ensure level 3 students have the best chance of success.
- Transition to post-16 education is enhanced by the strong partnerships between the sixth form and further education colleges. The school successfully guides students and their parents to ensure an appropriate match between ability and ambitions, and keeps options open through encouraging application to more than one college.
- The school's links with further and higher education give students opportunities they would not otherwise have. For example, a sustained and subject-specific art project at the University of Huddersfield for Year 11 and architecture students enabled them to understand how art can be applied to real problems. These students are more confident and are producing higher quality coursework. Students said the project had a huge impact on their aspirations. The architecture students learned how to seek views, present ideas and lead workshops.
- In a weekly science lesson for primary pupils, a secondary science teacher is supported by the well-managed and planned deployment of sixth-form science students who gain valuable work experience that is highly relevant to their future training and careers. This partnership across primary, secondary and post-16 education is an excellent example of transition planning and preparation for higher education.
- The school has begun to run science, technology, engineering and mathematics activities with the universities of Leeds and Huddersfield. The

high commitment and motivation of the science teacher is critical to effective planning with the universities.

- The school has initial teacher training links with the universities of Leeds and Huddersfield and Bradford College. The students bring fresh ideas and the trainees benefit from the expertise of teachers.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- extending collaboration with post-16 providers in specific subject areas
- specifically identifying students whose parents did not attend higher education to monitor their achievement and progression to higher education
- developing more formal partnership with subject departments in higher education to add value to undergraduate work experience in school.

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