

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Barker
Principal
Hugh Christie Technology College
Whitecottage Road
Tonbridge
TN10 4PU

Dear Mr Barker

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 25 February 2010 to look at your partnership 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; observations of teaching and learning; discussions with senior leaders, other staff and students; and meetings and telephone conversations with business partners.

Features of effective practice

- The college has established an impressive range of business partnerships that promotes students' learning and economic well-being successfully. Detailed case studies demonstrate how business partnerships have been powerful in helping individual students to overcome barriers to learning to improve their life opportunities.
- Business partnerships have been an important factor in developing a curriculum that is well-matched to students' needs. The college has been innovative in creating flexible provision that offers a wide range of choice to students, thereby increasing their motivation and engagement with learning. The personalisation of the curriculum is increasing inclusion, especially for the college's most vulnerable students. This is evident in the reduction in exclusions and the number of students not in education, employment or training aged 16 or 19.

- The college is right in drawing on the expertise of business partners to support the implementation of three Diplomas from September 2010 onwards. This is an ongoing development priority.
- Students have excellent opportunities for work experience and work-related learning. Business partners make a valuable contribution by offering short- and longer-term placements. In addition, business links are integral to the success of a range of courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. For example, students visit and research companies, undertake work experience and develop and market their own products.
- Business partnerships and cross-curricular enterprise activities make an important contribution to students' personal development and enjoyment of college life. There are extensive opportunities for students to develop communication, presentation, team-building and leadership skills. As a result, they develop into confident individuals with a desire to make a positive contribution to the college and the wider community.
- The benefits of your business partnerships are shared with other schools in the locality, for example, through effective outreach work with primary schools.
- The creation of leadership roles with responsibility for maintaining and developing links with business, such as Business Manager and Business Partnerships Coordinator, has been critical to the success and sustainability of partnerships.
- Business partnerships have been influential in extending methods of teaching and learning. There is a strong focus on developing competencies that increase employability, such as learning and thinking skills as well as literacy and numeracy. Students value the many opportunities to engage with real-life, purposeful activities that require them to apply and transfer skills. As a consequence, most develop into self-reliant, independent learners.
- The effective use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning has been central to the success of business-related courses. Excellent access to computers is helping students to raise the standard of their work.
- The college's links with businesses have helped to shape assessment practice. Emphasis has been given to developing students' capacity to evaluate their own and each other's work. Regular progress reviews take the form of appraisals which require students to be involved in target-setting and identifying evidence of their progress.
- Business partners contribute to effective careers guidance through talking to groups of students and inviting them to visit their companies to gain first-hand experience of the way they operate.
- A significant number of governors have a background in business. This increases the effectiveness of governance in promoting and challenging the impact of business partnerships on college improvement.

- Business partnerships have a positive impact on leadership and management. Leaders test value for money against business models and are highly successful in working with businesses to improve the environment and resources for learning.
- Business partners are clear their links with the school are mutually beneficial. They value the quality of relationships that have been established and the creativity that students bring to their businesses. In addition, they see the long-term benefits of helping to develop the workforce of the future.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- drawing on the expertise of business partners as you develop and implement new Diplomas.

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

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector