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Dr Jean Alder
The Principal
Futures College
Thorpe Bay
Southend on Sea
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Dear Dr Alder

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Fututres College

Introduction

Following my visit with Michael Stanton, additional inspector to your school on 24/25 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school opened in September 2007.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with groups of students, nominated staff, the Principal, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The college is in a partnership with Prospects Learning Foundation. The extensive building programme designed to allow these two organisations to work collaboratively on the same site continues to progress despite the change of contractors brought about by the current financial situation. It is anticipated the new facilities will be available in the summer of 2010. The systems and development manager has accepted responsibility for the transition arrangements related to the new buildings.

Achievement and standards

This visit took place in the last week of the 2009 examination period; the outcomes of these public examinations will be reviewed as part of the autumn term visit.

Personal development and well-being

Students speak positively about their lessons and their enjoyment of learning. Their aspirations are rising as the proportion of good teaching increases. Students are gradually becoming aware of their targets and are keen to make progress. The school has rightly raised its expectations of what students can achieve and in the good lessons, students are responding positively. However, students remain lethargic or inattentive where lessons fail to engage and challenge them.

Students generally behave positively in lessons and they report that instances of immature or inappropriate behaviour around the school have declined. The number of exclusions has reduced significantly since this time last year. This is because the college has evaluated the provision on offer and made appropriate alternative arrangements or negotiated managed moves with partner schools. Attendance, although improving, remains below the average for similar schools. The school has set itself challenging targets for the next school year. Systems are in place to monitor all students' attendance on a three-week cycle. The school closely monitors those students who enter Year 7 with a poor attendance record. All parents/carers have been made aware of these measures.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in July 2008:

- Continue to challenge the attitudes of some parents and students to education in order to improve overall rates of attendance - *Satisfactory progress.*

Quality of provision

Difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers undoubtedly have an impact on the quality of teaching in some subject areas. Nonetheless, slightly more than one third of the lessons in the college are now good or better and this represents an improvement since the last visit.

Teachers are beginning to make greater use of the range of data available on students' performance. In the best lessons, this information is used well to plan specific activities that enable students to make good progress towards their individual targets. The most effective teachers are enthusiastic practitioners, they know their students well, and have good working relationships. Question and answer sessions are well planned and provide students with good opportunities to clarify and extend their understanding; in these lessons, students behave well and make good progress.

In the best lessons seen, teachers provide students with models of good quality work. In an outstanding Year 8 English lesson, a group of boys were captivated by the imaginative relationship developed between images and text. The boys responded very well to the structured task and the prospect of peer evaluation. Many asked permission to reformulate their homework around the material developed. In some lessons, staff missed opportunities to set a clear context and clarify expectations. Generally, there are insufficient opportunities for students to assess their own and other students' work and this limits the scope of independent learning. Consequently, the students' skill in writing analytical or evaluative explanations is limited. The use of homework to consolidate and extend learning is variable. Support staff generally work effectively and many provide accurate instruction and guidance.

In weaker lessons, objectives are communicated in terms of what students should do rather than what they should learn. The planning of these lessons often outlines students' individual needs but, in practice, the planned learning activities are not matched well enough to students' needs or interests. Clarity of instruction declines where staff speak rapidly. Expectations of academic achievement vary and some teachers' skills in managing challenging behaviour are inconsistent.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2009:

- Improve the proportion of good or better teaching available to all students by continuing to develop amongst all staff the importance of the quality of learning to student progress – *Satisfactory progress*.

Leadership and management

Following a detailed review of the management structure facilitated by the impending departure of two senior colleagues to promoted posts, the principal has restructured the leadership team devising clear lines of accountability. The distribution of responsibilities provide appropriate links to the college's 'raising achievement plan' and enhances the focus on the quality of provision. The specialist consultants who reviewed the learning support area have guided the college's reorganisation of this work into linked teams. The impact of the new leadership team will be considered in the autumn term visit.

Safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements and the reorganisation of support for vulnerable students is helping to prepare the college for the enhanced safeguarding procedures required in September 2009. The transition to the new college buildings will need to be matched by well-considered curriculum development to ensure the success of the 14-19 agenda in the college development plan. The college is centralising all assessment for learning data to one 'live' system accessible by every teacher. Staff at all levels and the School Improvement Partner have made a significant effort to ensure the system is fully operational for September 2009.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in July 2008 and those given in March 2009:

- Develop senior and middle managers strategic use of systems for reviewing students' progress to guide their work – *Satisfactory progress*
- To aid the monitoring of student progress, ensure that the college's assessment database can readily provide summary data on student progress by teaching group, and for different groups identified by the college – *Satisfactory progress*.
- Governors should delegate the management responsibilities for the commissioning of the new college buildings to a member of the senior management team, other than the principal – *Good Progress*.

External support

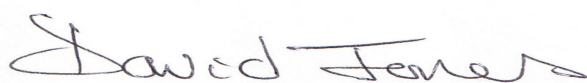
The review of progress conducted by the School Improvement Partner completes a series of effective evaluative reviews commissioned by the college since the last HMI monitoring visit. This helpful analysis has assisted the principal's well-considered review of the leadership team.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is - *Satisfactory*.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Prospects Learning Foundation, and the Corporate Director for Children and Learning, Southend on Sea.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Jones".

Her Majesty's Inspector