

## PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Dr Jean Alder  
The Principal  
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Dear Dr Alder

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Futures College

### Introduction

Following my visit with Michael Stanton and Norma Ball, Additional Inspectors to your college on 2 and 3 December 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the college opened in September 2007.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with groups of students, nominated staff, the principal, the chair of governors, a representative of the college's trust partners, Prospects Learning Foundation; 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 is nearing completion. The senior leadership team of the college has been extended with new roles and responsibilities allocated.

### Achievement and standards

The Ofsted evaluation schedule was revised on 1 September 2009 and this judgement takes account of the students' attainment and the quality of learning and progress for all students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.



Attainment on entry has been well below the national average for the last five years and that of the 2009 Year 11 cohort would be considered low against the national data. However, the unvalidated results of the 2009 public examinations show a notable improvement on the results secured in 2008. The proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSEs has risen significantly and the average points scored is close to the national average. Similarly, the proportion of students securing five GCSE pass grades is no longer significantly different to the national average.

The average points scored in English and mathematics has improved notably on previous years although the proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSE that include English and mathematics remains well below the national average. However, in the context of the students' prior attainment, the 92% of students who secured five GCSE passes including functional English and mathematics is a very creditable outcome.

In lessons, the quality of learning and the progress students made was at least satisfactory in nine out of ten lessons. Students made good progress when challenging tasks and well-focussed questions engaged their attention. Individuals who are learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities made similar progress to their peers and often made good progress where support staff and trainee teachers provided effective support.

#### Personal development and well-being

Students are showing increasingly positive attitudes to learning, and behaviour has improved significantly during the Fresh Start monitoring programme. Most students settle quickly in lessons and work well in pairs and small groups, especially when they are engaged with interesting work that challenges them appropriately. Students have a clear understanding of their targets and how well they are making progress. They comment favourably about the improved behaviour and feel that most staff deal effectively with distracting behaviour in lessons so that learning is not interrupted for more than brief periods. However, behaviour can still deteriorate and students can lose their focus if the work planned for them is routine and the pace of the lesson is slow. Closer staff supervision and positive attitudes from students have had a calming effect on behaviour throughout the college. There are fewer incidents of careless behaviour or low-level physically aggressive outbursts. These improvements have led to a recent reduction in the number of permanent and fixed period exclusions.

Attendance remains below the national average although it is improving well. This is as a result of a diligent approach to rigorous monitoring, rapid follow up where problems arise, and a popular reward system for improved attendance. The college seeks to engage families in attendance matters and other areas relating to personal development and is now meeting with greater success. Help from interpreters to

facilitate links with home are especially valuable as the number of students with English as an additional language is increasing.

The college provides a good range of flexible and well-structured support to promote the personal and academic development of all students which ensures full inclusion and equality of opportunity. This support is carefully co-ordinated by inclusion staff working as a committed team. Students' needs are quickly and accurately assessed so that support networks are matched closely to their requirements. Flexibility of approach allows for quick adaptations so the support provided for individuals remains fresh and relevant. Good links with a wider range of agencies and support services extends the work of the college well. Improvements have been made to the information held on looked after children, although the data on student progress, achievement and attainment is still not readily linked to their files.

Inclusion support is led by the vice principal whose workload has increased with a temporary responsibility for the coordination of special educational needs and/disability provision following the retirement of the previous post holder. Full time appointments of special needs support managers are providing effective additional capacity although the appointment of a permanent coordinator to lead the team remains a priority for the College. It is envisaged that the two support managers will have responsibility for the upper and lower college and that all inclusion provision will be arranged in this manner. The college is aware that the specific focus on both age and stage of student development gained from this structure will need to build on the high level of care provided for students. Currently this care is both sensitive and flexible and plans will need to ensure that this continues as students' progress through the college.

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 – *good progress*.

Quality of provision -

The large majority of lessons are now satisfactory or better with just above one third being good or outstanding representing an improvement since the last visit. In the best lessons, the quality of questioning drives forward learning; for example, in a GCSE science lesson on halogens, challenging questions and good use of display material engaged the students' attention and generated animated responses.

Good tracking data on student progress is made available to all teachers and this information is used effectively in the best lessons, to match tasks to students' learning needs. The tracking system also enables any underachievement to be pinpointed promptly so that appropriate action can be taken; parents/carers of individual students can access this information via the college's web site. The day to



day assessment and marking of students' work remains inconsistent. However, in the best lessons work is marked regularly and provides students with effective guidance on how to improve their work. There are increasing opportunities for students to assess their own and each other's work, which in turn is encouraging independent learning and helping to increase students' self-confidence.

In those lessons that still struggle to be effective, staff do not take sufficient account of the wide ability range of students in their classes. The teaching is pitched at one level and as a result students tend to 'sink or swim' in terms of the progress they can make. Although lesson plans often refer to the learning needs of different groups, the level of challenge and engagement provided remains variable.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and this contributes to the students' enjoyment because enthusiastic teaching styles engage student interest and enhances learning. Learning support assistants play a vital role in the quality of students' learning; they are well briefed in the majority of lessons. Trainee teachers are welcomed into the college and have a positive impact on student progress.

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

The Principal has made clear her vision for the college and is driving forward a well-considered transition programme that will enable staff and students to make use of the new and refurbished facilities as they become available. As a result of this regeneration programme, curriculum opportunities have already been enhanced in food technology. The new build programme is on schedule and the college anticipates having access to the new facilities in the summer term 2010.

The recently extended leadership team has an appropriate structure, and as a result, the management of areas such as assessment for learning and inclusion support have become more effective. Under the principal's guidance, leaders and managers at all levels are driving improvement and notably better teaching and learning have been secured. Increasingly effective use is made of relevant information about the college's performance to devise, implement, monitor and then adjust plans and policies. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning by senior staff now has an appropriate focus on learning and progress; this is in broad agreement with the judgements made by inspectors.

The new assessment database provides a robust capacity to monitor student progress, attendance and/or persistent absence as well as the impact of support provided; senior managers need to explore the full potential of this system to

enhance the management of information about student progress. Senior staff, governors and the leaders of the Prospects Learning Trust have appropriate plans to continue the development work on curriculum pathways to ensure the improvements in standards evident since the college opened are maintained.

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 – *good progress*.
- Governors should delegate the management responsibilities for the commissioning of the new college buildings – *good progress*.

#### External support

Futures College has benefited significantly from continued collaborative working and support from the local authority consultants.

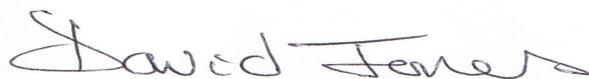
The external support of the Prospects Learning Trust has been vital to the physical regeneration of the college. The working partnership between governors, the representatives of the trust and the principal has been at the heart of every development. Governors and the Learning Trust are considering drawing new partners into the trust: it will be important to remember this must be a consensual partnership of equals.

#### Main Judgements

The college'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



Her Majesty's Inspector

