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Mr J Townsley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Townsley

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 14 January 2010 to look at your partnership with higher 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, observations, and discussions with you, other staff and students.

Features of effective practice

- The school works exceptionally closely and successfully with a wide range of higher education partners. This is having a positive effect on all aspects of the school's work, but especially on raising students' aspirations and achievement.
- The school makes excellent use of the Aimhigher initiative to promote the importance of higher education and forge strong links with providers. As a result, the number of students entering the sixth form and going on to university is rising steeply.
- The numerous opportunities for students to visit universities, including residential visits, have been central to the significant improvement in GCSE and A-level results in recent years. These visits develop students' confidence and self-esteem and encourage them to broaden their horizons and aims in life. The school is rightly seeking to increase students' involvement in the evaluation of partnerships with higher education.

- Teaching is appropriately challenging and, wherever possible, learning is connected to students' future success and preparation for advanced courses of study. Students are engaged with learning, for example, one commented, 'Teachers instil in us a love of learning. That is why so many of us want to carry on in education when we leave school.'
- The school believes that raising levels of students' literacy is fundamental to successful learning and enabling them to take their education as far as they possibly can. To this end, literacy features heavily in programmes of study throughout the school as an integral part of securing students' future economic well-being.
- The school works well with parents and carers to raise the profile of higher education. As a result, parental support for students continuing in full-time education when they leave school is very high. The school plans to involve parents and carers in visits to universities in the near future.
- The curriculum offers students a wide choice of courses and pathways to higher education, including excellent vocational options. Students benefit from the high levels of support and guidance they receive in deciding which courses they will follow. Students of all ages know their targets and exactly what they need to do to achieve them because of the school's thorough and effective procedures for checking every individual's progress.
- The leadership and management of partnerships with higher education providers are very effective. Governors are knowledgeable about this aspect of the school's work and their active support helps to sustain and develop the partnerships.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- increasing students' involvement in evaluating the impact of partnerships with higher education.

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

Stephen Wall
Additional Inspector