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Mr B Wall  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wall

Ofsted survey inspection programme – narrowing the gap in literacy and numeracy

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 - 5 June 2008 to look at work in literacy and numeracy.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at the key areas of literacy and numeracy, the visit had a particular focus on how the college is closing the gap for learners at risk of not reaching the expected level of attainment for their age. The visit also evaluated the level of expertise within the college to support students learning English as an additional language.

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 schools but individual schools will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with members of the senior management team, the heads of English and mathematics, the special educational needs coordinator, students from Years 7 and 10, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of provision for literacy and numeracy was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English and mathematics are exceptionally and consistently high. Achievement is outstanding.

- By the end of Year 11 the proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is well above the national average and over time the trend is rising.
- The progress of students in English and mathematics across Key Stages 3 and 4 is very high, given their starting points. When they join the college at the start of Year 7 they are working at levels just above the national average in English and mathematics.
- During Key Stage 3 the proportion of students working below their expected attainment level in English and mathematics has been significantly reduced as a result of detailed tracking, appropriate early intervention and support, high quality teaching, and fostering attitudes of wanting to learn in all students.

### Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- Lessons are regarded by students as fun and exciting but also challenging. This is particularly the case in English and drama and for older students in mathematics.
- Students respond well to group and pair work and benefit from opportunities to engage in discussions.
- Teachers' praise and reward systems motivate particularly those who are lower attaining.
- The use of information communication technology to develop both literacy and numeracy is very well established.
- Teaching assistants are deployed very effectively to provide focussed support where it is needed.
- Lesson planning, particularly in English and drama is of a very high standard. It focuses on the needs of individuals and provides suitable activities given students' varying starting points.
- All students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve in English but not all do in mathematics.
- Marking at its best provides detailed comments that help students to know what their next steps are. Assessment involves students in evaluating their own and each others' work.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- Students have benefited from a range of strategies before, during and after college to support their literacy. Although similar support has been offered in mathematics the take up is not as high.
- The sport and literacy programme 'Leap into shape' has been particularly successful in engaging and motivating boys at risk from disaffection and underachievement through the use of role models from the world of sport. All of the students on the programme have made significant gains in their learning and have developed their self esteem and leadership skills.

- The provision of small groups with focused support in mathematics has been successful in reducing the number of students falling behind by the end of Key Stage 3.
- In English structured work on literacy progress units, targeted at students in Year 7 below the expected attainment level, has also significantly reduced the number of students falling behind in literacy by the end of Year 9.
- Progress days are beneficial for students and parents in providing opportunities for individual discussion and feedback.

## Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy are outstanding.

- There is a culture of high expectations for all throughout the college which is set from the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Senior leaders are committed to ensuring staff are well qualified to work with low attaining groups.
- The college's specialist status in technology and sport promotes high standards in literacy and numeracy by sharing the best practice in teaching methodology.
- Transition links with primary schools are strong and this enables the college to know the needs of its students well before they arrive.
- In English a positive ethos is fostered in lessons which set challenge to all groups of learners in a fun and enjoyable environment. The quality of lesson planning is consistently high. Close links have been established in Year 7 between the special educational needs (SEN) coordinator and head of year to monitor the progress of students at risk of underachieving.
- In mathematics the organisation of intensive support for lower attaining groups is very good and popular with students. This is enhanced particularly when it is provided by specialist staff.

## English as an additional language

- The coordination of English as an additional language is managed through the SEN coordinator. There is no specialist teacher or teaching assistant for the small numbers.
- The college relies heavily on the local authority ethnic minority achievement service to provide assessments on new arrivals. It has also drawn on local service to provide training for staff at all levels but as yet the college is still dependent on this service.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- The teaching of students in mixed groups in English at Key Stage 3 is successful because highly skilled teachers plan effectively for the needs of all learners. This is backed up by a range of strategies in and out of the classroom to support individuals to prevent them falling behind.

- Teachers and students have the same positive attitudes to learning mathematics in lower sets as top sets.
- Learners of English as an additional language are integrated well into the life of the college. Through language awareness training and accurate assessment information the college ensures that new arrivals are placed in appropriate groups for their needs.
- Close tracking of all groups of learners and early intervention ensures that most learners catch up in literacy and numeracy by the end of Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the very high standard of lesson planning and support and guidance in English is achieved as consistently in mathematics
- extending the sport and literacy initiative to numeracy
- developing the capacity within the college staff for specialist knowledge of English as an additional language.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop literacy and numeracy in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, 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

Mark Sims  
Her Majesty's Inspector