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Mr P Bhutta
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Dear Mr Bhutta

Ofsted survey inspection programme – good practice in literacy

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 14 and 15 October 2009, to look at work in literacy.

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 made included discussions with senior leaders and middle managers. I also visited parts of thirteen lessons, spoke to students and looked at documents including school data and students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- Students on free school meals do well at Stepney Green. They make good progress during their time in the college and their attainment at GCSE is significantly above the national average for students on free school meals. The proportion who achieve five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics is in line with the average for all students nationally.
- The college has significantly reduced the number of fixed-term exclusions of students and has successfully developed alternative strategies to keep students engaged with their learning while dealing with consequences of their actions. Behaviour of students in lessons is of a very high standard. Their level of attendance is high and rising.
- Former students work well with current students as mentors and act as role-models to younger learners.

- All curriculum areas are required to provide literacy plans in their subjects and this leads to a consistent approach to literacy by teachers in all subjects. The process of self-evaluation between subject leaders, line managers and the headteacher/deputy headteachers is well-established and highly effective in reviewing performance and identifying individual needs. A cross-curricular working party has identified and disseminated the best practice in teaching literacy to all staff.
- Students benefit from additional curriculum time in English in all year groups. Despite the college's specialist status, there is more curriculum time for English than mathematics in recognition of students' needs in literacy. In Year 10, targeted students benefit from a support option where they can spend more time on coursework and improving their literacy skills.
- While recognising some disadvantages of not being culturally diverse, the college has built up a strong sense of community with students and parents. The college builds on the heritage of its students through the encouragement of Bengali GCSE and drawing on students' own experiences of East London and Bangladesh.
- Early entry for English GCSE in Year 10 enables students to experience AS level work in Year 11 and for others, the opportunity to retake the GCSE examination to achieve a higher grade.
- All students recognise the importance of doing well in English and its value in contributing to success in other subjects. In lessons, teachers have high expectations of students. Learning objectives are consistently linked to targeted levels and grades. Students benefit from the opportunity to develop their speaking skills through group work and pair work. Adults engage well with learners. Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- The curriculum meets individual students' needs well. For those not aspiring to an academic curriculum there are alternative vocational courses which engage students. Students benefit from a range of out-of-hours learning and support sessions, including Saturday mornings, which they are happy to attend.
- Every individual's needs are known to the school. Information about students is shared widely to ensure that staff are well-informed on the needs of all, including the most vulnerable learners. Vulnerable students are identified early through effective transition arrangements and links with local primary schools.
- Students know how well they are doing and they know their target grade or level. Marking is informative and, at its best, lets students know how well they have done and precisely how they can improve their work. Students are involved in assessing their own work, including those at a very early stage of English language acquisition. Academic tutor-days ensure students can review their progress and be familiar with their targets.

- You and your senior leaders have made literacy a high priority through the investment of funding additional resources for students, extra curriculum time and training for staff. Senior leaders lead by example in setting high expectations. Community links with parents have a high status through placing the post of community project leader as part of the senior management team.
- The school engages very well with parents, the overwhelming majority of whom attend parents' events. The school has developed very strong partnerships with local schools and outside agencies which have been beneficial to the progress of the most vulnerable students, including those who are looked after.

Areas for development

- Continue to provide speaking opportunities for students to develop their skills further.
- Ensure that students know consistently how to reach the next level of attainment in their subjects through their written targets.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop literacy in your school.

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