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Dear Mrs Vernon

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 12 and 13 October 2010 to look at the leadership of the federation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, staff, parents, a local authority representative and pupils; and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Outcomes

- As a result of federation, the proportion of pupils leaving the high school with entry level qualifications has grown impressively. For example, results show that the numbers of pupils gaining qualifications in English and mathematics has risen considerably. The major improvements to the curriculum have resulted in pupils now gaining qualifications that they were unable to access before the federation, for example, in design and technology, physical education, art and design and information and communication technology. Staff are rightly proud of the four pupils who gained a GCSE in art and design this year.
- The continued improvement in achievement is the result of the very rapid progress that all groups of pupils make compared with similar groups

nationally. Recent school inspections judged this progress to be outstanding.

- The federation has maintained the very high standards of behaviour and attendance that existed before its inception.
- Pupils spoken to were extremely confident. They were proud of their schools and achievements. They take great responsibility for contributing to the school community through activities such as the school council and the voluntary work that older pupils take part in weekly. One important achievement was in the design of the school logo where pupils insisted that the word 'special' was not included.

Provision

- A major feature of the federation's success during the restructuring of special education in Tamworth was the establishment of primary and secondary education where previously, schools had catered for all pupils from age three to 18. The result of this has been the development of an outstanding curriculum and teaching that is sharply focused on the age-specific needs of all individuals. This has raised the expectations of staff, pupils and parents about what pupils can achieve. It has also resulted in pupils feeling more included in the wider community as they are able to demonstrate that they are having the same type of education as others of their age.
- The quality of lessons is of the highest standard because of the great expertise of teachers and teaching assistants. They provide a comprehensive range of skills that ensures that they can meet the needs of all individuals regardless of the obstacles they experience.
- As a result of the federation, the curriculum is now highly enriched. Pupils take part in a great range of exciting activities, such as the green car racing where they have constructed cars in science lessons, the federation concert, annual residential trips to France and the success a few pupils experienced when they won a national art competition recently.
- Federation leaders have identified that the next step in curriculum development is to forge stronger subject links between the schools to improve the continuity of subject-skill development.
- Teaching assistants are expert at ensuring the mental and physical well-being of pupils through the range of therapies and activities that are tailored carefully to meet the needs of all.
- A particularly strong feature is the quality of care for parents. Those spoken to were unanimous in their praise for the consistency of the quality of guidance and support they receive throughout their child's time in the federation schools.

Leadership and management

- Governors, parents, the local authority representative and staff are unanimous in their view that the great success of the federation largely

results from your extremely strong leadership. You have demonstrated great ability and a clear vision for the improvement of the education of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- You are supported very well by other leaders, staff and governors who have a common sense of purpose for improving the life chances for pupils. The consistency of this ethos throughout the federation is impressive.
- Expert strategic planning by leaders and governors overcame the barriers to reorganisation and federation very successfully. Parents and staff were understandably anxious at the time, but the high quality of communication and consultation quickly overcame their concerns.
- A well-established governing body is rigorous in its duty to hold you to account for the strategic development of the federation.
- Federation leaders are expert at targeting training to individuals as well as checking the quality of their work. Consequently, all staff feel valued and empowered, but appreciate that in return they have to be accountable for the consistently high standards expected by you and other senior leaders.
- The federation has forged very strong partnerships with other agencies, such as the health professionals based in the schools. Parents were particularly appreciative of their support. In addition, the Nursery has very effective links with the necessary agencies responsible for assessing children that are all situated on the Torc Campus. This is of considerable benefit to children and their parents who are able to access all the agencies through the Nursery.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the links between schools in the federation so that further improvements can be made to subject-skill progression.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

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 may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector