



25 May 2005

Mr R Martlew
Principal
da Vinci Community College
St Andrew's View
Breadsall
Derby
DE21 4ET

Dear Mr Martlew

Collaborative Restart: Inspection of da Vinci Community College

Following the visit of Jane Jones HMI to your college on 18 and 19 May 2005, I write to confirm the findings which are recorded below.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the college opened in September 2004. The focus of the visit was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the college; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the raising attainment plan.

During the visit, eleven lessons or parts of lessons, one registration session and an assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the principal, two vice principals, three assistant principals, a group of pupils from the school council, the vice chair of the shadow governing body, and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils, and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the principal, the vice chair of the governing body, and a representative from the LEA.

Da Vinci Community College is a smaller-than-average comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years: there are 505 pupils on roll, with approximately equal number of boys and girls. The college serves an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage; 37 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The college has identified 35 per cent of the pupils as having special educational needs; of these pupils, 22 have a formal Statement of Special Educational Need. Just under five per cent of the pupils are of ethnic minority heritage; few have home languages other than English. An increasing number of pupils are joining the college at times other than at the start of Year 7. The pupils' attainment on entry to the college is very low overall although there is a significant minority of more-able pupils.

Da Vinci College opened on the site of the former High View School and Technology College under a collaborative restart arrangement with Lees Brook Community Sports College. High View School had a long history of serious weaknesses in the quality of education it provided for its pupils. It was deemed to require special measures in January 2002 but, over the next five terms, made limited progress. In November 2003, following the departure of the headteacher, the school entered into a collaborative partnership with Lees Brook College. Under the strong leadership of the executive and associate headteachers, the school made rapid progress and demonstrated the capacity for further improvement; it was removed from special measures in June 2004. The formal collaboration between the two colleges is due to continue until March 2006, but the partnership arrangements are strongly forged and both colleges intend to continue the relationship beyond that date. New accommodation to house the college is currently under construction on the site through the Private Finance Initiative.

The college was fully staffed with specialist teachers on opening in September 2004. About two thirds of the staff from High View School were appointed to positions at da Vinci College; external appointments were made to the other posts, a number of which were at middle-leadership level. There are seven teachers who are newly qualified or on graduate training programmes. The associate headteacher, who had been in post since November 2003, was appointed to the substantive position of principal in April 2005.

The college has worked hard to improve the quality and reliability of the teachers' assessment of the pupils' performance and progress. It predicts that the results of the national tests and GCSE examinations in 2005 will be closer to the college's targets of around 50 per cent of the pupils attaining Level 5 in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3, and 20 per cent attaining five or more higher-grade passes at GCSE.

In lessons, the standards attained by the pupils varied from well below average to just above average. In the main, the pupils were making at least satisfactory progress in relation to their ability and prior attainment, but many pupils have some distance to go to make up for ground lost in previous years. Although improving, the pupils' basic skills of literacy, oracy and numeracy are weak and remain an impediment to their progress. However, the better teaching is helping to address these areas and to develop the pupils' independent learning and study skills.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in nine of the eleven lessons, including three in which it was good and one very good. It was unsatisfactory in two lessons. There were several general strengths in the teaching. The teachers had appropriate expectations of the pupils' behaviour; they made use of a range of resources that drew on different learning styles; and they shared the learning objectives with the pupils, often explaining them and revisiting them later in the lesson. An emerging strength is the teachers' use of assessment to promote the pupils' learning, such as reference to levels of performance and examination criteria. The quality of questioning has improved. In the best lessons, the teachers were enthusiastic and involved all of the pupils, for instance through the use of mini

whiteboards. The lessons proceeded at a brisk pace, with seamless movement from one learning episode to the next, skilfully building the pupils' knowledge and understanding.

There were various shortcomings in the weaker lessons, including some that were satisfactory overall. Teachers did not check that the pupils understood key terminology; there was a mismatch between the planned tasks and the pupils' needs and abilities; there was a lack of clarity about the contribution that the teaching assistant would make to the pupils' learning; and teachers failed to engage the pupils' attention fully.

There were some general areas that require development: although lesson plans identified different learning outcomes for groups of the pupils, these were not always supported by an appropriate range of different activities that were matched accurately to the pupils' abilities. Too often, common tasks were set for the whole class and the pupils tackled these with different degrees of success. The teachers' planning rarely took the pupils' special education needs into account. Some of the targets on the pupils' individual education plans, however, were broad and not easily translated into modified provision; many others related to desired improvements in the pupils' behaviour. At present the individual education plans are having a limited impact in supporting learning.

The quality of learning lagged slightly behind the teaching, being satisfactory or better in eight lessons, including one in which it was good and one very good. It was unsatisfactory in three lessons. Sometimes, weaknesses in the pupils' literacy and numeracy impeded their rate of progress. In some lessons in Key Stage 4, the pupils were compliant but unenthusiastic: the teachers had to work harder than the pupils. Overall, however, there were some marked improvements: the pupils generally played a more active part in the lessons, sustained their concentration well, and in several lessons, they asked as well as answered questions.

The pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning were satisfactory or better in ten lessons, including four in which they were good and two very good. The pupils' attitudes were unsatisfactory in one lesson. Moments of inappropriate behaviour were rare and they were swiftly and skilfully managed by the teachers. A climate for learning has been established in the college. The notable improvements in the pupils' behaviour and the developing strengths in the teaching have underpinned the pupils' more positive attitudes to learning. The college is well placed to capitalise further on the pupils' response in order to increase their rate of progress.

Around the college, the pupils' behaviour was generally good. They were polite to adults, including visitors, and to each other, and were often keen to talk about their work and life in the college. A strong sense of belonging, teamwork and pride in the college is emerging. Attendance has risen significantly; at 90 per cent to date this year, it is five percentage points higher than for the equivalent period in 2003-04.

The college's inclusive approach informs all of its work. Behaviour is not seen in isolation, but as part of a pupil's physical, emotional and intellectual well-being. A

significant number of pupils present a range of challenging behaviours, and the college adopts a range of suitable strategies through a multi-agency approach to address them. The rate of exclusion is reducing but remains too high; there were 274 fixed-term exclusions in 2003-04 and 140 to date this academic year. In part, the figures reflect the college's consistent stand on unacceptable behaviour.

There are an increasing number of opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility and play an active part in the life of the college. The school council is influential and is confident that its views are valued; for instance, it has been involved in the appointments of staff, including the principal. The introduction of mixed-age tutor groups for pupils in Years 8 to 11 has been successful and has provided opportunities for the older pupils to take responsibility and help others. The pupils showed a greater awareness of the wider world, both in terms of the opportunities they have and their aspirations, and understanding of the contexts in which others live locally, in England, and abroad; for instance they raised £2470.15 for the "Whizz Kids" charity and are participating in the "send my buddy to school" campaign.

The curriculum at both key stages meets statutory requirements, but is recognised as needing further development. There is sensible use of alternative provision for the most vulnerable pupils. The college has adopted a new approach to option choices at Key Stage 4 by firstly establishing the pupils' preferences through careers discussions, individual interviews and guidance, and then determining a set of pathways based on those choices. This is likely to lead to three pathways.

Assessment has been a strong area of focus for the college over the last year, and good progress has been made. There are reliable systems for setting targets and tracking the pupils' progress, supported by a range of intervention strategies. The use of assessment to promote the involvement of the pupils' in their learning has a high profile; for example, through displays of criteria and information in pupils' books, but there is still some work to do in relation to marking, the use of curricular targets, and teachers' planning.

The principal provides very good leadership of the college: there is a clear focus on raising standards that is shared by the staff, and increasingly is recognised by the pupils and their parents. The principal empowers, and is ably supported by, the team of three vice principals and four assistant principals, each of whom leads their areas of responsibility well. The senior staff are reflective; their evaluation of the impact of actions taken is generally accurate and soundly substantiated, and they use the findings to inform subsequent planning. Moreover, they have a good understanding of the interrelationships between the areas for improvement.

The quality of middle management is improving and is satisfactory overall; some is good. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and better understood. An effective structure for line management has been established and is playing a key part in the dual roles of support and challenge for middle-level leadership. A suitable system of performance management has been introduced based on the line-management structure.

In the early days of the collaborative partnership, several staff from Lees Brook College were seconded to High View School. Currently, there are three seconded staff, all of whom are assistant principals. The enhanced senior leadership team has been instrumental in bringing about improvement, and is helping to build capacity at all levels of management within the college so that its dependence on Lees Brook College reduces over time. Rightly, the principal has started to review the structure of the senior leadership team to meet the future needs of the college.

At the time High View School was removed from special measures, there was an Interim Executive Board (IEB) that shared common membership with a shadow governing body, and there was a School Improvement Partnership Board (SIPB). The IEB has now ceased and the governing body was reconstituted in April 2005; parent governors are to be elected in the second half of this term. The progress of the college has been such that the SIPB is to terminate at the end of this academic year.

The college's improvement plan is detailed; it is coherent and strategic in its sequences of actions to build sustainable improvement. Raising attainment is rightly at the heart of the plan and its central importance is well understood by all in the college's community. The college has made good progress in establishing and embedding many of the structures and activities to underpin future improvements in standards and achievement, and eradicate the legacy of underachievement. The indications at this stage of the academic year are that these actions will bear fruit in the tests and examinations this summer: reasonable progress has been made in raising attainment.

The LEA has drawn on a range of its services to provide valued support for the college. Its work has been appropriately focused and responsive to the college's needs. The LEA, however, recognises there is a need to review the mid-year admission of pupils to the college, especially pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. To date this year, the college has admitted 38 pupils, many of whom have significant needs.

At this stage of the college's development, its main strengths are:

- the leadership of principal and senior leadership team;
- the shared vision and sense of purpose across the college;
- the pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning.

As the college strives to raise attainment, areas for further improvement at this time are:

- the quality of teaching;
- special educational needs;
- the use of assessment;
- the role of middle leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair the shadow governing body, and the Director of Education for City of Derby. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division