

12 July 2006

Mr R Martlew  
Principal  
Da Vinci Community College  
St Andrew's View  
Breadsall  
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Dear Mr Martlew

## **COLLABORATIVE RESTART: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DA VINCI COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with John Foster, Additional Inspector, to your college on 21 and 22 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the college opened in September 2004. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, nominated senior staff and middle-level leaders, a group of students from the college council, the vice-chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with students.

### **Context**

Da Vinci Community College is a smaller-than-average comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 16 years. There are 543 students on roll, 38 more than at the time of the last monitoring inspection in May 2005. Many students join the college part way through their secondary education; 70 so far this academic year of whom 30 are in Year 9. The college serves an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage; about two fifths of the students are eligible for free school meals. A third of students, which is double the national average, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities; of these, 13 have formal Statements of Special Educational Need. An increasing proportion of the students, eight per cent,

are of ethnic minority heritage. Some of these have home languages other than English and there are a few who are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The college admits students of all abilities but, overall, their attainment on entry is low and was particularly low for the 2005 GCSE cohort.

Da Vinci Community 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. The formal side of this arrangement concluded in March 2006 but a strong and equal partnership remains between the two colleges. The college is fully staffed with specialist teachers. New accommodation to house the college is nearing completion; its occupation is awaited with excitement!

### **Achievement and standards**

Standards attained in the national Key Stage 3 tests in English, mathematics and science in 2005 were close to the college's targets of around half of the students reaching at least Level 5, which is the standard expected at age 14 years. There were significant rises in English and science when compared to High View School's last set of results, and mathematics continued the rising trend. The provisional 2006 Key Stage 3 results in mathematics, which arrived immediately after the inspection, built further on this improving pattern. Although standards in 2005 were below average, the results represented broadly satisfactory progress when students' Key Stage 2 results were taken into account. Students made less progress in English than in the other subjects particularly for the more able students.

Standards attained in the 2005 GCSE/GNVQ examinations represented significant improvement when compared with High View School's 2004 results and were broadly in line with the college's targets. Large rises saw 22% of the students attaining five or more A\* to C grades, and 83% five or more A\* to G grades. Most students passed at least one GCSE. When the students' very low results from primary school are taken into account, it is clear they made good progress, and significantly better than similar students elsewhere. However, there remains scope to build more securely on students' achievement at Key Stage 3, particularly in moving from Levels 5 and 6 to GCSE grade C and above.

Standards in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) remain low and sometimes an impediment to students' progress. The college has a range of strategies to tackle these areas: some are further advanced than others. Students' skills in speaking and listening have improved, in part as a consequence of the college's work on improving teachers' questioning skills, but also due to the continual improvement in students' attitudes to learning.

The college has worked hard to develop effective systems to ensure that teachers assess students' performance accurately and track their progress. It predicts further improvements in results in 2006, particularly at GCSE. The significant number of students who have joined Year 9 since September 2005 has affected

the academic profile of the year group, making the college less likely to reach its published targets. Importantly, though, the college has a firm grip on the progress of each student and the performance of individual subjects, as well as seeing the big picture of rising standards and achievement. Senior staff are clear about where further improvement is needed and how it might be achieved; for example, in seeking to improve the proportion of students reaching the higher Levels 6 and 7 at Key Stage 3, they recognise the need to ensure that targets for individual students are appropriately challenging and reflected in the expectations of students' learning on a day-to-day basis.

The college has continued to focus on the effective use of assessment to promote learning. Good progress has been made with many approaches becoming well embedded throughout the college. There is a shared language of standards: students know their target grades and show increased awareness of what they need to do to achieve them. Displays of assessment criteria written in straightforward language are supplemented by illustrative examples in many classes. Students' exercise books contain helpful information, although tracking sheets are not consistently up-to-date. In lessons, many teachers make timely references to assessment criteria to help students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to achieve a particular standard in addition to helping raise their aspirations. While marking is generally carried out regularly, there remains, as the college has identified, work to be done to improve its quality.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in May 2005:

- improve the use of assessment – good progress

### **Personal development and well-being**

Students' personal development is good. They behave well around the college, between lessons, at break and at lunchtime. They are open and welcoming to visitors. They get on well with each other and take a pride in their college. There is a strong community feel to the college that is reflected in increased participation in social and academic events. The spectacular fall in the number of fixed-term exclusions to almost one tenth of the level of two years ago, is a clear indication of the improvement in students' behaviour. This improvement has been achieved through the use of a wide range of well-judged strategies. Misbehaviour has not been completely eliminated, but the college manages it skilfully, its approach being to engage every individual positively and to intervene early to de-escalate problems.

The improvement in students' attendance noted at the time of the last monitoring visit has been sustained. Attendance figures for this year are higher than for 2004-05. This is in no small part due to the strenuous efforts of the college in monitoring attendance, working with parents and outside agencies, and taking effective action where necessary. Students are punctual to lessons. They are left in no doubt that the college cares whether they attend and arrive on time. During the inspection, however, attendance at many lessons was reduced, sometimes to

less than half the normal number of students, generally because of the range of alternative activities, such as taster days for Year 9 students in the new, popular BTEC First course in construction that the college runs in partnership with two other local schools. The college makes effective alternative curricular provision for students at risk of not completing their secondary education.

The college offers numerous opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and to make a contribution to college life and to the wider community, especially in local primary schools. The democratically elected college council meets weekly and is highly effective in promoting the views of students. It was closely involved in formulating the college's rewards system, now managed by senior students. This system is much appreciated by students and has proved effective in motivating them. Surveys show that students feel safe at college, and that their fear of bullying has dramatically reduced. The college's system of support groups and mentors, including peer mentors, contributes very well to their feeling of security.

### **Quality of provision**

Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection. Inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons. The college's own view of the teaching, that nine out of ten lessons are at least satisfactory and more than half of them good or better, aligned well with the inspection findings. Senior leaders have established a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning and of individual teachers, principally by means of its process of curricular area review.

Teachers have high expectations of students' conduct and consistent classroom routines have been established. Students' behaviour was good, indeed excellent in several lessons, and their attitude to their studies was usually positive. Teachers' lesson planning has improved, and is now often good. They pay more attention to the variety of needs and learning styles of their students although their skill in matching learning activities to individual needs is acknowledged by the college as an area for further development. Teachers are enthusiastic, and this enthusiasm is often transmitted to their students. In two lessons, however, students' comparative lack of motivation and energy meant that learning lagged behind teaching. Students' weak literacy skills remain an impediment to their learning, but they are growing in confidence in the way they express their feelings and views.

Teachers explain lesson objectives and key terms clearly. There is some inconsistency in the way these objectives are revisited or success in reaching them checked. Teachers' questioning is often of a high quality. The most effective teachers are skilled in the use of follow-up questions and prompts to draw out more detailed or accurate responses from their students. The pace of their lessons is usually brisk, with a variety of activities sustaining students' interest and concentration. In less successful lessons, however, low-level tasks take up too much time or the teacher talks too much, slowing students' progress towards the main learning objectives.

Homework is not set regularly enough, or of sufficient quality to be effective in raising achievement. Marking has improved, and students say they value the commentary on their work which helps them to improve. However, inspectors found that the quality of marking remains variable and, even when it is good, students do not follow teachers' comments through. Teachers do however use National Curriculum levels and examination criteria as an effective tool to raise students' awareness of their own progress towards targets.

Provision for students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved considerably since the last monitoring visit. Training has helped teachers use assessment information to inform their planning. Teachers are provided with more coherent information about students' special needs, and have been able to use this information more effectively to plan lessons and to match work to individual needs and abilities. Professional coaches have been used to promote this development. The quality of students' individual education plans has improved; targets are generally more concrete and easier to measure in the classroom. Termly progress review involves parents closely and over two thirds of parents attend the review days. The rest are contacted and, where possible, individual appointments made.

The role of learning support assistants has developed well. They are now used more effectively, for example they are fully involved in the tracking of students' progress. The reading intervention programmes which they deliver have been successful in raising reading levels. A pre-teaching programme in Key Stage 3 English and science has enabled students who have learning difficulties to participate more fully in their lessons. All students on this programme are working at or above their targets. The college has welcomed 70 new students this academic year, many of whom have a complex range of learning difficulties, a history of behaviour problems, or whose home languages are other than English. These students have been successfully integrated, but this has been a strain on the college's resources.

The college provides good care and guidance for all its students. Its personal, social, health and citizenship education programme is of high quality. Guidance in choice of careers and courses is good, and is much appreciated by students. The vast majority now go into further education, training or employment when they leave the college.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in May 2005:

- raise the quality of teaching – good progress
- improve provision for students who have special educational needs – good progress

## Leadership and management

The principal's leadership is outstanding: his understated style belies the clearly evident impact of his leadership. All in the college's community, staff and students, know they are valued and are empowered to play the fullest part in the work of the college. They speak of the transformation that has taken place over the last two years: the college is now a much happier place. There is a clear and shared focus on raising standards and fulfilling potential: the legacy of underachievement is being eradicated. In turn, students are beginning to demonstrate higher aspirations and take more responsibility for their learning in lessons.

The principal empowers, and is ably supported by, his team of senior colleagues and increasingly influential middle-level leaders. Management systems and structures are robust and the evidence, generated on a regular basis, is interrogated and interpreted incisively to inform subsequent action: strategic leadership is strong. The college's self-evaluation reflects the senior leadership team's accurate knowledge of the quality of the college's work and it identifies where development is needed, both the next steps and leading to the longer-term vision. Improvement planning is good: key priorities and appropriate actions are identified and there are suitable arrangements to gauge their impact against success criteria.

Line management is effective and its developmental mixture of challenge and support is a strong contributory factor to improvement at middle-leadership level. Performance management is an integral part of staff development. The college has introduced an effective rolling programme of area review, following which the subject leader is supported in developing an action plan to address any issues and areas for development that emerge. These plans vary in quality; for instance, arrangements for monitoring and evaluation and timescales for actions could usefully be more sharply defined. The process of area review is sensibly to be extended to the pastoral system next year. This is one suggestion to come from meetings of the middle-level leaders, which are now chaired by a middle leader, reflecting the ownership demonstrated by this group of their role in the college's work and longer-term development.

The governing body was newly constituted in September 2005. It has appropriate committee structures and full membership except for one parent vacancy in which three parents have expressed an interest. The LA has agreed to provide training tailored to the needs of governors at da Vinci and Lees Brook Colleges.

Overall, leadership and management are good and place the college in a strong position to continue to improve and develop. This college knows where it is going and has a good understanding of how to get there.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in May 2005:

- develop the role of middle-level leaders – good progress

## External support

The LA continues to provide an appropriately high level of support for the college. Much stems from the various strands of the Secondary National Strategy. Crucially, however, the college is determining what support it needs to help bring improvement and the LA is keen to help by drawing on a range of its services. It might also work with the college to seek innovative ways to support the high level of mid-year transition of students into the college, including those who have home languages other than English.

## Main Judgements

The college's overall progress is good.

## Priorities for further improvement

The college has identified important areas for development within its improvement plan. As it continuously strives to raise standards, the college should:

- improve students' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, and equip them better for independent study;
- continue to improve teaching and students' rate of progress, particularly through matching work to individual needs and potential;
- improve the effectiveness of homework and feedback to students;
- seek ways to involve governors more fully as an integral part of the college's leadership and management.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for City of Derby.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones  
**H M Inspector**