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Dr A Minard  
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Dear Dr Minard

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 colleges

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Robin Gaff, additional inspector, and I inspected your college on 25 November 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the visit. Please convey my thanks to the staff and governors who met or held telephone conversations with inspectors.

The college is in the process of applying for trust status and is in the final stages of the consultation process. Its status as a specialist technology college was renewed in January 2009.

As a result of the inspection on 5–6 November 2008, the college was asked to improve the provision in the Nursery; ensure lessons provide more challenge to improve progress and GCSE performance; and ensure that governors can fulfil their role as critical friends.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Standards at Year 11 have improved since the last inspection, particularly over the last year. The proportion gaining five A\* to C grades in 2009 increased by 15%, English results rose, and the proportion gaining at least five good grades including English and mathematics exceeded the government's floor targets for the first time. While the college's leaders know standards need to improve further in order to give students the best chances for their future education and lives, their drive to raise standards is clearly narrowing the gap between the college's and national attainment.



The college's specialism is making a positive contribution to teaching and learning in other subjects. For example, joint projects with other subjects have broadened teaching strategies and, in turn, boosted students' learning and progress. Almost all of the targets associated with the specialism were met or exceeded in 2009.

The college's leaders have ensured a sharp focus on students' achievement. Central to the improvement in achievement is a greater focus on assessment and feedback, which is leading to improved learning for students in lessons. In addition, the curriculum has been modified so that students benefit from a more personalised curriculum, based on careful diagnosis of what individuals need. This more tailored approach is also helping students' attendance to improve. Although below average, it is also showing an improving trend, particularly for the group of students who have been poor attenders in the past.

Since the last inspection, a key focus for the college has been broadening the range of strategies used by teachers to make assessment an integral part of every lesson. This is developing well and was evident in all lessons seen during the visit. In most cases, students knew what they were learning, what was expected of them and what they needed to do to reach a higher level or grade. Most were involved and motivated, and enjoying learning. Nevertheless, some teachers apply these approaches more successfully than others and there are instances when learning is not always as secure. Marking also continues to show some variability.

The college has worked successfully in conjunction with the local authority to address the inadequacies in the Nursery. The outdoor area has much improved and is a safe place for them to play and learn. The provision for information and communication technology has also improved, and includes a variety of appropriate toys and resources. The college senior leadership team and governors have forged closer links with the Nursery, which is a positive move. The curriculum is becoming aligned to the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage but there is still further work to do in some areas, such as creative development. Adults observe babies and children and note the small steps in their development, but these are not always effectively recorded and collated to provide an overview across the six areas.

Governors have strengthened their role in holding the college to account for its standards and the minutes of their meetings demonstrate that they challenge senior leaders. The full governing body has broadened its methods for finding out about standards through presentations from different subject leaders. This is giving them a better understanding of the strengths and priorities within subjects.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your college. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson  
Her Majesty's Inspector

