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3 December 2009

Mr C Booth  
Principal  
Barnsley College  
Church Street  
Barnsley  
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S70 2YW

Dear Mr Booth

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: girls' and young women's achievement

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, during my visit on 19 November 2009, to examine the causes of girls' and young women's underachievement and long-term economic well-being and the good practice that effectively supports them.

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 included discussions with staff; observation of parts of two lessons; discussions with two groups of young women; and relevant documentation provided by the college.

Overall, your work on promoting the achievement of young women and in developing their future economic well-being is good, with some outstanding features. In the main, young women make stereotypical choices about the subjects they choose and the careers they wish to pursue. Within this context, young women, including those who are vulnerable, are successful in gaining the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need for future employment. The recent development of a Health and Well-Being Centre within the college has the potential to make a significant contribution to supporting young mothers and to reducing teenage pregnancies in the local area.

Features of effective practice observed, include:

- well-motivated young women, who enjoy their courses, gain their qualifications and develop a good understanding of expectations in the workplace

- a broad curriculum offer that very effectively provides young women with a good range of career and progression opportunities
- a high degree of flexibility within the curriculum to ensure that those who are mothers or are pregnant are able to successfully complete their studies
- highly effective and well-integrated support and guidance for young women, particularly for those who are at risk or vulnerable
- pro-active leadership to promote the achievement of young women and to support initiatives to develop their economic well-being
- the pivotal role played by college within the local community, that attempts, with increasing success, to work with external partners to raise standards for girls and young women
- a highly innovative approach to health promotion, with the recent opening within the college, in collaboration with the local Primary Care Trust, of a purpose built Health and Well Being Centre.

Areas for further improvement, which we discussed, included:

- recruiting more young women on to construction and engineering courses
- raising young women's awareness of pay levels for different job roles, thereby helping them to make informed decisions about their career choices.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to promote achievement and develop the economic well-being of young women.

As I explained, a copy of this letter will be sent to the local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Harriet Harper  
Her Majesty's Inspector