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Mr M Sim
Principal
Salford City College
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Dear Mr Sim

Ofsted 2010–11 good practice survey programme: improving science in colleges

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit between 1 and 3 February 2011 as part of our science survey.

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

The evidence included: meetings with senior managers, the heads of science, course team leaders, teaching staff, tutors and students; observations of six lessons; discussions with students; review of students' work; and analysis of documentation.

Features of good practice

- Success rates are high in access to higher education provision, GCE A levels and a majority of AS subjects, as well as in the National Diploma in applied science; a course with significantly increasing numbers of students.
- The proportion of students that progress to higher education from all courses is exceptionally high.
- Lessons are consistently interesting and are well planned, with a good mix of learning activities that build sequentially on students' knowledge and understanding.

- Students demonstrate good development of study skills and the ability to work both collaboratively and independently. By the time they have completed courses, they are accomplished learners.
- Students' progress is monitored effectively and is accompanied by target-setting that they use and understand well.
- Students make very good use of the college's virtual learning environment to help them make progress.
- The college offers many well-attended and publicised science clubs and special events that successfully raise students' aspirations and ambitions. These include outside speakers, themed events such as biomedical, veterinary and medical careers sessions, and an Oxbridge and Russell group preparation club.
- Liaison with local secondary schools is excellent. This has included specific taster events, and successful invitations to school pupils to attend college science clubs.
- The college has an imaginative collaboration with a local hospital to enable some students to undertake relevant work experience. Together with college-based events and mock interviews, this has resulted in an increased number of students progressing to study medicine.
- Well-organised and frequent events and visits to nearby universities have led to close working relationships that are developing quickly.
- Exceptional leadership stimulates both staff and students to overcome barriers to achievement. The management of the curriculum has a clear and focused drive for improvement.
- The effective lesson observation system places an appropriate emphasis on learning and identifies areas for development well.
- The effective and systematic identification and sharing of best practice are well developed. Accurate self-evaluation is sufficiently critical and recognises areas for improvement as well as strengths.

Area for development, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to improve success rates in a small minority of GCE AS courses.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science provision.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the relevant funding bodies and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector