

End of academic year reflection

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This past year I have visited nearly 50 schools in the UK and overseas. Sometimes it has been as a reviewer (*Blink*), sometimes as a leadership coach, sometimes to work with students and teachers, sometimes to listen to headteachers' views on a range of educational matters.

I thank them all for sharing their classrooms, ideas and opinions.

One particular visit stands out – to a school where *Work Hard, Be Nice, No Excuses* is a simple mantra lived by everyone in the building. After the visit, I wrote the following letter.

Dear Headteacher and Staff

The quality of education

The College continues to provide an excellent quality of education for all its students, rooted in an open Christian ethos and a simple set of ubiquitous guidelines: *Work Hard, Be Nice, No Excuses*. Clarity of purpose pervades.

ES is a happy, harmonious, intelligent school, at ease with itself, where staff and students share common goals. Teachers and support staff know the students as individuals and thus are able to meet consistently their wide range of learning needs. Students' progress is excellent, with some especially strong sixth-form performances in recent years; teachers continue to strive to raise students' attainment levels at GCSE.

The College's leadership team is highly skilled and restless to improve. They interrogate and fine-tune current routines; they think through carefully any changes they are making and communicate effectively with their colleagues. The way in which middle leaders are being supported and challenged by a 'visiting expert' is typical of the College's deliberate practices. Another example is the way in which leaders are visiting other schools to look at ways in which under-achievement with certain groups of students can be tackled more successfully.

The campus presents as very well cared for, and recent refurbishments have enhanced provision in a number of ways. The attractive and busy library sits at the heart of the College; facilities for SEND and inclusion give the message that all students are valued. Classrooms for practical and academic subjects project a strong learning culture through well prepared resources, interesting wall displays and appropriate furniture configuration. The day-to-day use of information technology by staff and students is impressive.

The main hall, with its colourful array of flags from the 50+ nations represented by staff and students, continues to embody all that the College stands for; and the excellent dining arrangements remain another indicator of the fine attention to detail which is characteristic of so much of SE's everyday practice.

The College's meticulous systems and high expectations were singularly in evidence throughout the day of the review: major GCSE examinations were taking place; a Year Group literacy session was being held; cover was needed because of external visits; and Ramadan meant adjusted timings of the school day. Throughout all this, there was no sense of raggedness or time being wasted. To the contrary: in observing 20+ lessons students were constantly on task and teachers were working assiduously to ensure good academic progress.

Students, families, staff and governors can be rightly proud of what is being achieved every day at ES. The College has clearly enhanced its reputation in recent years, evident in increased applications at Year 7 and Year 12. The leadership's ability and aptitude to sustain excellence, whilst at the same time questing wisely to improve, signal a continuing bright future as a 'stand out' local community academy.

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