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Mr A Tunstall
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tunstall

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: assessing pupils' progress (APP)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 12 October 2010 to evaluate the impact of the APP initiative.

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: scrutiny of documentation; observations of teaching and learning; and discussions with senior leaders, other staff and pupils and a representative from the local authority.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is good.

Impact on pupils' achievement and attainment

- Teachers' use of assessment and their greater understanding of progression from Key Stages 1 to 2 are contributing to improvements in pupils' achievement and attainment. Standards have risen since the school's previous inspection in June 2009. Unvalidated data for 2010 indicate that pupils have attained above the national average overall. However, the attainment of more able pupils, particularly in writing remains an issue.
- The use of APP criteria and assessment to support learning has improved the rigour of target-setting at a whole-school level. Pupils are clear about their overall National Curriculum targets in English and mathematics, particularly in Year 6. They are not as clear about their short-term targets. The school is beginning to involve pupils in setting their own targets but this is not yet consistent across the school.

- The consistency and accuracy of marking has been a whole-school focus since the introduction of APP. Evidence in books shows that marking has improved significantly and is contributing to raising pupils' achievement. This is because pupils, especially those in Year 6, are clearer about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work further.

Impact on the quality of pupils' learning and progress

- The school is using the APP criteria well to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Those underperforming, for example, boys in writing, are given appropriate support through well-organised intervention strategies.
- APP has helped to improve teachers' subject knowledge, particularly newly qualified teachers and middle leaders who have responsibility for APP in their subject areas. Consequently, teachers clarify with confidence the component skills that add up to successful learning for individuals and groups of pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- APP has improved the consistency and clarity of assessment practice. This has encouraged the school to share pupils' learning targets with parents so that they can support their children's learning more effectively. Some of this work is delivered through the school's parents' and adult education centre. The school is looking to engage a wider circle of parents beyond those who attend the centre.

Impact on the quality of teaching and the use of assessment to support learning

- The professional dialogue instigated by APP has been highly beneficial in uniting the whole staff. A shared language for assessment is enabling staff across phases to discuss pupils' learning with a view to sustaining their progress as they progress through the school.
- APP has reinforced a collective responsibility and accountability for pupils' overall achievement and attainment. Teachers and teaching assistants are more systematic in using assessment to maximise the progress of all pupils. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers in planning their work to ensure that they too support all pupils, particularly those with special education needs and/or disabilities and those that are more able.
- The accuracy of teachers' assessment was confirmed at a recent external moderation meeting. Assessment information is being used more effectively to plan learning that builds on pupils' capabilities and understanding. However, in discussion, some pupils commented that their work lacked challenge.

Impact on the curriculum

- Teachers have a greater understanding of the strengths and weakness in pupils' learning. This is assisting them in personalising the curriculum to deepen pupils' engagement. As one pupil noted, 'teachers want to know what I am interested in'.

- APP is encouraging teachers to map assessment opportunities across the curriculum. Alongside this, the school is rightly reviewing its current curriculum to develop creativity and increase pupils' participation and engagement.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- involving all pupils in setting their own targets
- developing a flexible, creative curriculum that stimulates pupils and caters for their wide range of needs.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop assessment practice in support of school improvement.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector