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Mr W Deighan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Deighan

**Ofsted 2010–2011 survey inspection programme: assessing students' progress (APP)**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 6 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, representatives from the local authority, other staff and students.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is good.

**The APP initiative**

**Impact on students' achievement and attainment**

- The increased accuracy of teachers' assessment and their deeper understanding of progression are making a positive contribution to students' achievement. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has risen over time in English, mathematics and science. School data for 2010 indicate that attainment is the highest it has ever been and above national averages.
- Teachers have a more secure grasp of students' attainment through the use of APP criteria. Where this practice is embedded, particularly in English and for pilot groups in other subjects, it has enabled teachers to boost achievement.

## **Impact on the quality of students' learning and progress**

- Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, know and understand their targets for improvement. Where APP is embedded and the quality of written feedback is strongest, they also have a clear understanding of how to achieve the next step in their learning.
- The school's focus on assessment practice and APP has increased dialogue about learning between teachers and students. In addition, students have more opportunities than before to evaluate their own and each other's work against clear success criteria.
- APP is used very well to identify gaps in students' learning so that interventions can be tailored carefully to meet individual needs.

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

- Where APP is embedded, assessment practice is focused sharply on students' progress. Increased opportunities for teachers to share and moderate students' work, both internally and with other schools in the local authority, is improving the consistency of teachers' assessment.
- The link between assessment and planning has been strengthened by APP. Where practice is most effective, teachers target learning activities precisely to meet the needs of individuals and groups of learners.
- Teachers are using APP criteria to make thorough written comments on assessed pieces of work, particularly in English. There is evidence that students are responding well to this clearer guidance. However, the quality of marking varies across the curriculum.
- APP has been instrumental in stimulating debate about the best methods of teaching and learning.

## **Impact on the curriculum**

- APP has led to significant revision of the Key Stage 3 schemes of work in English. Learning is now better sequenced and consolidated by a range of assessment opportunities. These improvements are being extended to mathematics and science.
- APP has helped teachers to tailor the curriculum more successfully to students' needs. For example, there has been a focus on group work in science and greater use of probing questioning in mathematics.

## **Areas for development, which we discussed, include:**

- sharing best practice in marking to reduce variation in the quality of teachers' written feedback to students
- ensuring that students are well-informed about the next steps in their learning in all subjects.

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

**Peter Gale**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**