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Mrs E Phillips
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Phillips

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 14 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; discussions with senior leaders, other staff and pupils; and a conversation with a representative of the local authority.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is outstanding. The local authority has noted how well and fully the school is supporting the approach to APP in the borough.

Impact on pupils' achievement and attainment

- APP has strengthened the confidence and understanding in the assessment of pupils' progress contributing to their high attainment and achievement.
- The effective use of APP within the school's assessment framework, complementing initiatives such as Making Marking Meaningful, is ensuring that progress and attainment remain high.
- Pupils are continuing to make good progress through the use of appropriate and challenging targets and support that APP identifies.

- The vast majority of pupils and, especially, the large groups of pupils for whom English is not their first language make better progress than estimations would suggest.

Impact on the quality of pupils' learning and progress

- A pupil who moved from level 5 in year 7 to level 7+ in Year 8 made the following comment. 'Understanding the assessment foci really helped as I knew exactly what the skills were and exactly what to do to go up a level. I know now what skills to work on in English because we began learning about them in year 8. I could actually look in my book for advice on how to move up. It gave me a sense of achievement.' This comment is representative of the achievement of several pupils and illustrates that they have greater confidence and a sense of control over their learning and progress.
- Effective use of APP is contributing very positively to good transition for pupils entering the school and the sixth form; it has helped teachers in the sixth form to make successful interventions when students are in difficulty because of the ethos and experience of good monitoring and assessment.
- APP practices have prompted staff to rewrite vocabulary and produce simpler targets for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities of whom the school has a high number; this has also contributed to better transition arrangements and training within departments.
- Pupils are gaining greater confidence in evaluating their own performance and learning in class; by being able to distinguish the steps they need to take to progress they are exercising greater choice in how they learn.
- Pupils report that feedback is constructive and meaningful, helping them to learn and move forward, though the 'how to do this' is not always made clear enough. Assessment is supported by a very good monitoring system and the use of clear and appropriate targets and feedback to parents.

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

- The involvement with APP has helped teachers to clarify the skills, the sequence of learning and the different types of assessment needed, leading to improved progress and more effective teaching.
- The school has in place suitable and well-considered interventions and support through its readily accessible data on performance of pupils that links to APP and the assessment for learning.
- APP has contributed effectively to:
 - schemes of work and lesson plans being reviewed carefully to develop within context the skills needed for each subject
 - links being reinforced between lesson planning, pupils' performance and assessment
 - implementing systems and procedures to moderate work and ensure the standards are valid and effective.

- Teachers know the pupils well and the data help them to use their knowledge of prior performance and learning to match lessons to their capabilities and plan next steps.

Impact on the curriculum

- The delivery of the curriculum is continuing to be personalised and the approach to APP is complementing the other work the school is doing to enhance learning, such as in social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL), and personal, learning and thinking skills.
- Pupil and parents receive meaningful and helpful information and data on performance to help them make informed choices and decisions about courses.
- Monitoring throughout the curriculum is thorough and in line with APP so that good assessment practices are shared through the key stages, informing curriculum delivery and development.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring the system of diagnostic assessment is fully embedded across all areas
- making certain that all teachers explain more specifically how to improve in the specific subject areas.

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 Green
Her Majesty's Inspector