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Mr R Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Thomas

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, other staff and students, and the local authority officer.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is good.

The APP initiative

Impact on students' achievement and attainment

- Students' attainment has improved significantly in the last year with a higher proportion gaining five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C with and without English and mathematics. In particular, in English, where teachers use APP methods of assessment, results were above national averages. Even though results in maths and science are also above national averages APP is only beginning to be used in those subjects.
- APP is being implemented as part of a whole-school strategy to improve assessment practice. The school's focus on students as individuals, the increased accuracy of teachers' target-setting and closer monitoring of students' progress have resulted in students either achieving, or

surpassing their targets. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have also benefited and make good progress.

Impact on the quality of students' learning and progress

- Teachers use APP criteria very effectively to identify strengths and gaps in students' learning in English. They use this assessment information to plan lessons and tailor interventions that help students to make greater progress. A variety of methods used in lessons and in written work, elicit what students need to do to improve and inform specific feedback. Formative assessments contain precise references to the component skills and understanding that students need to master a subject.
- As a result of using APP, students demonstrate a good understanding of success criteria in English lessons and across other subjects. Through using these criteria, they actively reflect on the quality of their own work and that of others, thereby, increasing their understanding of how improvements can be made.

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

- APP has had a positive impact on the consistency of assessment practice. Effective staff training has shared best practice. The implementation of new approaches to learning in lessons is monitored well by leaders and managers, including during their learning walks. Findings from lesson observations contribute to the rigour of school improvement.
- The school is focusing this year on cross-phase discussions of students' learning to support their progress through points of transition. This, along with the need to fully embed APP in mathematics and science, is included in the current priorities for the school.
- APP criteria have significantly increased English teachers' and senior leaders' confidence in moderating judgements about the quality of students' work. The school is now focusing on developing collaborative practice and robust professional dialogue across subjects.
- Teachers' feedback to students is more accurate. However, checking that they respond to the guidance given is inconsistent, and students sometimes do not follow-up on what they are asked to do.
- APP has reinforced a collective accountability among staff for students' progress in English. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants use assessment information more effectively to set and monitor students' targets.

Impact on the curriculum

- As a result of APP, teachers have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in students' learning in English. This is contributing to personalising the curriculum and maintaining continuity in students' learning experiences.

- In English, the use of APP materials has led to good assessment practice, clear target-setting and moderation procedures. However, in mathematics the APP materials are making less impact. Teachers are finding it more difficult to match teaching to the full breadth of students' needs.
- The accelerated learning curriculum in Year 7, with its focus on assessment for learning and APP is fostering students' skills in self-evaluation and this provides a solid foundation for self- and peer-assessment as they move up the school.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening consistency in marking to ensure that students follow-up on the areas identified for improvement in written work, particularly accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling
- developing moderation and the sharing of teaching approaches across 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

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector