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Mr D Maloney
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Maloney

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 14 September 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.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is good.

Impact on pupils' achievement and attainment

- The increased accuracy of teachers' assessment and their deeper understanding of progression in developing students' subject-specific knowledge and understanding has had a positive impact on raising attainment and achievement. This is particularly marked in English where, as a result, more students are attaining higher grades, including A and A*, in GCSE examinations.
- Target-setting now reflects more accurate assessments of students' individual strengths and areas for improvement.

Impact on the quality of pupils' learning and progress

- Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from their increasingly precise understanding of how

well they are doing and how they can improve. Most, but not all, students are able to articulate what they need to do to raise their attainment.

- APP has supported the swift identification of students at risk of underachievement. As a result, intervention strategies are better targeted and more effective.
- APP has contributed to improved monitoring systems. The school is developing strategies to use the information generated by these systems to help parents to support their children's learning.

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

- APP has supported teachers in planning learning activities with clear success criteria which they, and their students, can use to measure how much progress has been made in lessons. Students enjoy and benefit from assessing their own and each other's work.
- Teachers' diagnostic skills have developed through the use of APP. Their identification of students' strengths and areas for improvement is increasingly accurate. However, not all teachers are equally effective in using this information to tailor learning activities to meet the needs of individual students and groups. Consequently, in a few lessons, some students struggle to sustain their concentration.
- APP is encouraging teachers to reflect on methods of teaching and learning with the objective of developing a wider range of strategies to evaluate students' progress in lessons. Questioning is used well to gauge students' understanding.

Impact on the curriculum

- APP is having a significant impact on curriculum planning. The use of assessment to support learning now underpins the recently revised schemes of work in mathematics and English.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that teachers use assessment information consistently to plan learning activities which fully meet the needs of all students
- extending the range of strategies that teachers use to check students' understanding during lessons so that misconceptions can be identified more quickly and good progress consolidated more effectively
- developing opportunities for students to respond to teachers' written feedback to fully embed their understanding of what they have done well and how they can improve.

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

As I 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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector