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04 October 2006

Mr J Baldwin
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Dear Mr Baldwin

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Attendance for Learning in Secondary Schools

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 October 2006 to look at your work in promoting attendance.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff, pupils, and representatives from the local authority; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and observation of two parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of your work in promoting attendance was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

- The school has sustained an attendance rate over a number of years which has hitherto compared very favourably with the local authority average. The decrease in the recorded rate of attendance in 2005/6 continues to be a matter for discussion with the local authority and it is not yet clear how far variations in the application of new government requirements and guidance have impacted on the school's comparative position. The local authority has confirmed, however, that the lower figure in 2005/6 does not represent a real change in the level of attendance at the school.
- Achievement and standards in relation to the small group of pupils observed on this visit were good.

Quality of teaching and learning

- The school uses a wide range of measures to emphasise to pupils and parents the importance of good attendance to raising pupil achievement.
- Staff relate consistently well to pupils and give much additional support, both personal and academic, in their own time. Pupils appreciate and respond to this. They feel they are treated with both care and respect.
- In the two lessons seen, the pupils with attendance problems were fully and effectively engaged with the work of the class. The quality of teaching and learning was outstanding.

Quality of curriculum

- The quality of the curriculum in supporting attendance is good.
- The school has substantially expanded the range of activities offered at Key Stage 4, including part-time attendance at college and extended work experience placements. This has enabled more customised packages to be put together to meet pupils' individual needs.
- Considerable extra curricular provision, including residential trips, extends the range of experiences available to pupils and further strengthens relationships between pupils and staff.

Leadership and management of attendance

- Leadership and management in relation to attendance are outstanding.
- Measures to improve attendance feature prominently within the school's overall development planning.
- The school records very detailed information on the pupils' attendance and makes good use of it to produce a range of data analyses. Particularly impressive within this is the work which has established a clear and quantified correlation between attendance and pupil achievement.
- The school similarly makes very good use of its attendance data to identify developing problems at individual pupil level. Thereafter both the planning of interventions and the review progress is rigorous. The involvement of senior staff in such processes ensures that attendance continues to be seen by all concerned as a key priority for the school.
- Reasons for pupil absence are challenged robustly and, where necessary, by senior staff within the school.
- Good use is made of rewards and sanctions for both pupils and parents.
- Effective action is taken to invite pupils' views on how the school operates.
- There is good collaboration with other schools, both in terms of managed transfers and in easing the transition from primary school for pupils identified as potentially vulnerable.
- Liaison with other agencies is a strength.

Inclusion

- The provision for inclusion in relation to attendance is outstanding.
- Very effective support is provided to help poor attenders back into full-time attendance at school with full participation in classroom activities.

- All the pupils interviewed said that there was at least one member of staff who took a particular interest in their well-being and progress.
- All said similarly that there was at least one person who they could approach with confidence about any problems.
- There are a number of sources of personal support for pupils with problems, including counselling and adult and peer mentoring.

Activities to further strengthen existing good practice, which we discussed, were:

- using the detailed attendance information available to compare pupil attendance at lessons across the different academic subjects
- setting more precise targets for improving aspects of attendance in the school improvement plan.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your attendance work in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

J.N. Cordwell
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc LA