

06 November 2006

Mr M Bullough
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bullough

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Attendance for Learning in Secondary Schools

Thank you for the hospitality and your staff's co-operation, particularly Mrs Calvert, during my visit on 16 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 good.

Achievement and standards

- The school has made modest but steady progress each year, for a number of years, in reducing its overall rate of absence. A like-for-like comparison for the current term with the 2005/6 academic year shows further improvement.
- For the few pupils tracked on the inspection, levels of engagement and achievement were at least satisfactory and in many cases good.

Quality of teaching and learning

- A good range of measures is taken to emphasise to pupils, parents and staff the links between attendance and pupil achievement.
- The school has made the development of personalised learning and associated teaching strategies a major focus of its development activities.

- Relationships between staff and pupils are mainly good, although there are significant variations between members of staff in terms of supporting pupils when they return to lessons after a period of absence.
- A good range of learning and personal support is provided to those with the greatest difficulties.
- In the two lessons seen, the pupils with attendance problems were effectively engaged with the work of the class. The quality of teaching and learning was good.

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 work experience placements. This has enabled more customised packages to be put together to meet pupils' individual needs.

Leadership and management of attendance

- Leadership and management in relation to attendance are good.
- Attendance and achievement are now very much treated as part of an integral whole when planning and reviewing provision, both for individual pupils and within the school more generally.
- Individual pupil attendance is monitored regularly and both the planning and review of action to secure improvement are good.
- The school records very detailed information on pupil attendance, although continuing problems with establishing an electronic registration system have hampered both the collection and analysis of data.
- An appropriate range of rewards and sanctions is used to encourage good attendance, both for pupils and parents.
- A number of steps are taken to invite pupil views on how the school operates, although some pupils lack confidence that their views have much influence on decision making.
- There is effective support to ease the transition from primary school for pupils identified as potentially vulnerable.
- Liaison with other agencies, including other schools, is a strength.

Inclusion

- The provision for inclusion in relation to attendance is good
- Nearly 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.
- Nearly all said similarly that there was at least one person who they could approach with confidence about any problems.
- Effective steps are taken to address any bullying.

- There are a number of sources of personal support for pupils with problems.

Areas for improvement, which I discussed with your colleagues, included:

- using the detailed attendance information available to compare pupil attendance at the lessons of individual members of staff and across the different academic subjects
- establishing a more consistent approach amongst teaching staff to the support of pupils returning to class after a period of absence.

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