

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6644  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



13 November 2006

Dr E J Yeates  
The Headteacher  
Venerable Bede Church of England Secondary School  
Tunstall Bank  
Ryhope  
Sunderland  
SR2 0SX

Dear Dr Yeates

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the impact of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

I am grateful for the hospitality and co-operation of you and your staff during my visit with Pat Kime HMI on 30-31 October to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As well as looking at key areas of the SNS, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of continuity and progression for pupils on entry to secondary school.

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 and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness and impact of the SNS was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

The strategy has made a positive and beneficial impact since the school opened five years ago. The school made the strategy a central part of the new structure and it has supported pupils' good achievement from the beginning.

Standards are above average in mathematics and improving. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. The ability of the intake in year 7 is rising

and the work of the strategy continues to be central in making sure good progress is maintained. The strategy has been particularly successful at raising the achievement of borderline Year 10 pupils.

Achievement is good in English. Pupils' who find learning most difficult are well supported by the strategy. They make the best progress in relation to their starting points. The present Year 9 pupils are making good progress and are well set to gain significantly higher results than the previous year group. The influence of the strategy is significant in making sure all pupils achieve as well as they can in English.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The strategy has made a large impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are consistently well planned and structured in both subjects. Learning objectives are particularly clear and they are shared with the pupils. The school has an effective system to analyse assessment data and has started to make very good use of the information. Feedback to pupils on how well they have done in English, and what they need to do to improve in both subjects, is not always consistent. The school knows this and is taking the right action to make improvements by disseminating examples of very good practice.

### Quality of curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum for English and mathematics is securely founded on the key principles of the strategy. It is used well to adapt the curriculum for pupils likely to gain lower GCSE grades and with learning difficulties.

### Leadership and management in English and mathematics

Leadership and management are good in English and very good in mathematics. The school accurately evaluates the work of the strategy and take swift action when problems arise. For example, staff in English took rapid steps to halt a fall in standards last year. There is a good awareness of what needs to be improved and how existing strengths might be developed. The focus of the school's good planning for improvement is unswervingly on the quality of teaching and pupils learning. Senior staff has the commitment, insight, and knowledge to implement these plans well.

The Local Authority has provided well targeted consultant support in English which has improved the quality of data analysis and supported a new initiative called the 'Study Plus' pilot aimed at improving GCSE performance in English and mathematics.

## The quality of transition to secondary school

The arrangements for transition from primary to secondary school have significant, developing strengths. Recent good initiatives linked to the strategy have resulted in improvement taking place, such as the joint planning of a transition unit for work to carry over from year 6 to year 7. The school recognises there is work to be done in the continuity of teaching and the curriculum.

## Inclusion

Provision for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, particularly the extended provision. The school has tackled underachievement by the most able pupils and girls well. Good plans are in place to make further improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthening and extending the partnership with feeder primary schools
- raising standards of reading in English
- making the quality of feedback to pupils on how to improve more consistent.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English and mathematics 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

Paul Hancock  
Her Majesty's Inspector