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27 September 2006

Mrs A Green
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Dear Mrs Green

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 Deana Holdaway HMI on 25-26 September 2006 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, 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 ten English lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in English are good.

- Standards are good in English although achievement is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 3 achievement is best where the principles of the national strategy have been embraced fully and are adopted confidently in lessons.

- Vulnerable groups of pupils perform well. Pupils who enter the school with below average ability in writing receive effective support and make good progress.
- In the few lessons where teachers had not fully applied the principles of the strategy, tasks lacked effective challenge for pupils to attain their expected targets by the end of Key Stage 3.
- Pupils' attitude to learning in English is excellent, particularly where routines developed from the strategy have been embedded well.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning is good in English.

- Pupils made good progress in lessons where they were encouraged not only to analyse texts but also to apply their understanding in structured writing.
- Assessment and monitoring procedures, based on strategy principles, are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in English. When teachers tracked individual progress closely, tasks and targets were appropriately challenging.
- Support and guidance is good. Pupils feel their teachers and mentors help them to do their best.

Quality of curriculum

The English curriculum is good.

- Departmental planning for developing literacy and ensuring appropriate progression in the National Curriculum is good.
- Pupils indicated that they enjoyed their English lessons.
- Provision for pupils in Year 7 who require further support to improve their writing is good.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- The head of department has a clear vision and improvement plans indicate clearly how the strategy is being developed to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching.
- The department is supported well by the senior leadership team and especially by the school's strategy manager.
- Assessment data is analysed effectively to monitor trends in performance in the department. However, the outcomes of individual pupil assessments do not inform closely the lessons that follow.
- The school's self evaluation is rigorous. Departmental self-evaluation indicates accurately the priorities for developing the strategy principles in English.

The quality of transition to secondary school

The quality of the transition arrangements between Key stages 2 and 3 is good.

- A broad range of activities, including presentations and meetings provide pupils, parents and teachers with the information they need.
- Induction arrangements together with Year 10 mentors help to make Year 7 pupils feel safe.
- Close liaison with primary schools and effective data ensures that pupils experience appropriate challenges in their learning.

Inclusion

- Information regarding the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties is particularly effective and enables appropriate support for pupils on entry to the secondary phase.
- Assessment procedures are enabling more teachers to analyse and interpret pupil progress information for the benefit of all pupils and their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure more pupils in English achieve their expected targets by the end of Key Stage 3 by extending and embedding further the principles of the strategy
- to ensure assessment information is used effectively by all teachers to plan appropriately challenging tasks for pupils.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector