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Dear Mr Edwards

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies: 10-11 October 2006 visit

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your colleagues, during my recent visit with Linda Kelsey, HMI to look at the implementation of the Secondary National Strategy and in particular work in mathematics and transition issues.

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 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the Secondary National Strategy was judged to be satisfactory, with some good features.

Achievement and Standards

- Achievement and standards in mathematics are satisfactory. Attainment at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 has risen in recent years, with the best recorded results in 2006. Both are now around the national average. Pupils make sound progress in lessons.
- Pupils' attitudes are positive and they are keen to contribute to activities in class. Their behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is good.

The Quality of Teaching and Learning

- The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory overall with some good features. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen.
- Individual teachers are using many elements of the Strategy well – for example clear learning objectives, lively starters and good plenaries and mini-plenaries. This good practice, when observed, could usefully be applied with greater consistency from lesson to lesson and across the teaching team.
- Teachers use the interactive whiteboard effectively for presentation, and sometimes involve pupils in coming to the board to demonstrate. However, pupils' prior knowledge and skills in ICT from primary school are not being built on systematically.
- Teachers mark work regularly, but rarely give explicit written guidance on what pupils need to do to improve. Peer discussion and assessment are used well in a minority of classes.

The Quality of the Curriculum

- Curriculum provision in mathematics is satisfactory. Pupils are setted for the subject on entry to the school, and these sets are reviewed regularly. However, planning and delivery do not always focus sufficiently on meeting the needs of different groups of learners within these sets, for example higher-attaining pupils or those using English as an additional language. Pupils are not always seated in combinations which best support their progress.
- Preliminary work is underway to establish a greater consistency of approach to literacy across the curriculum. Appropriate strategies have been agreed, but this work is at an early stage of development.

Leadership and Management

- Leadership and management in mathematics are satisfactory. Following a period of significant change, and recruitment difficulties, the school now has stability in both senior leadership and in subject leadership and staffing within mathematics.
- The two curriculum leaders for mathematics have good subject knowledge and provide good models of practice for their team. Their monitoring of classroom work and pupils' progress across the subject is, however, insufficiently developed, with the result that they have yet to identify best practice and ensure that it is effectively disseminated. The school now has good systems in place for continuing professional development and these have the potential to bring about greater sharing of best practice.

- The school values, and has made good use of, Strategy consultants and significant support has been given in recent years. This is now having a clear impact on practice in teaching and learning; the school recognises that further work is needed to bring about a greater degree of consistency across classes.
- Whilst teaching assistants are valued by pupils, there is no clear rationale for their deployment across classes and subjects, and insufficient planning by class teachers for their role within lessons.

The Quality of Transition to Secondary School

- The quality of transition in terms of pastoral care is good. Induction procedures and liaison meetings with the main primary cluster schools are secure, and good guidance is provided for pupils and their parents or carers. Pupils settle in quickly and feel secure, and good attention is paid to friendship groups.
- There is no subject-specific programme to ensure curriculum continuity and progress, and no action plan for improving transition. Key Stage 2 test data are transferred and used by the school to establish Year 7 teaching groups, which are then confirmed by further testing. However, insufficient account is taken of the detailed pupil-tracking data available in primary schools, showing individual pupils' academic progress over time.

Inclusion

- The school's inclusive approach is characterised by its harmonious relationships and the welcome it extends both to Year 7 pupils and to those who join its community later in their school career.
- Analysis of the progress of different groups of pupils is at a relatively early stage of development. There is a significant and growing number of pupils whose first language is not English, and the school is just beginning to plan adequate support for them. Good work is being undertaken to identify the home languages of pupils, but class teachers do not systematically receive this information and do not always know how best to meet these pupils' learning needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- to analyse the attainment and progress of different pupil groups – building on primary tracking data, wherever this is available – in order to meet their needs more effectively
- through closer monitoring of classroom practice and pupils' written work, to identify and disseminate best practice in assessment, e.g. the use of self- and peer-assessment, and formative written feedback
- to increase the support for, and teachers' understanding of, the needs of pupils using EAL.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to implement the Secondary National Strategy and develop mathematics and successful transition in your 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

Anne Feltham
Her Majesty's Inspector