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Mr Gordon Redley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Redley

Ofsted survey programme: evaluation of Reforming and Developing the Workforce

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit to Dorchester Middle School on 28 and 29 of November 2006 to evaluate the impact of Reforming and Developing the Workforce. Thank you also for the work you did in advance of the visit. You set out the documents that I needed helpfully and clearly and made them readily available to me.

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 children, scrutiny of documentation, a lesson observation and analysis of pupils' work.

The overall effectiveness of reforming and developing the workforce in your school was judged to be good.

Impact on standards and the outcomes of Every Child Matters

The impact of the strategy has been good, helping to raise achievement and standards from below average in 2004 to average in 2005 and slightly above average in 2006.

- Standards are average when pupils join your school at the beginning of Year 5 and slightly above average at the end of Key Stage 2. Results in the Key Stage 2 tests in 2006 are slightly higher than those in 2005 and much higher than in 2004. This is, in part, due to the good level of

support children and teachers receive from the teaching assistants.

Results in mathematics and science are higher than in English.

- Pupils feel safe in the school and value the support and help they receive from their teachers and members of the wider workforce. The Year/Key Stage Assistants play a significant part in this.
- The strong and positive relationships between teachers, the wider workforce and the pupils contribute to their emotional well-being. Teachers are reinforcing this by using the time that has been saved during registration sessions (from routine administrative tasks) to increase the amount of time that they can devote to the pastoral support of pupils. The Year/Key Stage Assistants have a valuable role. Because they are not involved in teaching, they are a regular and welcome presence on corridors and outside classrooms. They can provide a first line of support for pupils when teachers and teaching assistants are fully occupied.
- Pupils' attitudes to school are very positive. They enjoy school and especially the physical education opportunities, which help to keep them healthy, and the activity days. The wider workforce has a significant role in organising and resourcing much of this provision.
- The inputs of teaching assistants with particular talents are enhancing the pupils' experience in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), technology and art. This increases pupils' enjoyment of learning as well as raising standards.

Impact on the quality of teaching and learning

The impact of the strategy on the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The wide range of tasks undertaken by teachers during Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time is contributing to improvements in teaching and learning. For example, the opportunity for teachers to have guaranteed preparation time is strengthening their planning and assessment practice. Lessons include a wider range of teaching and learning strategies and better resources as a result. Pupils report that their lessons are interesting and enjoyable. Increased attention to differentiation ensures that pupils' individual needs are being met more effectively. This has contributed to the rise in results in 2006.

Impact on the quality of curriculum

The impact of the strategy on the quality of the curriculum is good.

- The teaching assistants have additional expertise, in teaching pupils with sight or hearing disabilities, for example, which has contributed significantly to the curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs. The teaching assistant who is providing physiotherapy for wheelchair users is enabling them to access the full curriculum whilst this takes place.

- The school recognises and values the expertise of the wider workforce and is using it effectively to extend the range of extra-curricular activities. There is a good range of these and almost a quarter run with the support of teaching assistants or outside coaches. Activities such as the football coaching add significantly to children's enjoyment of school and to their achievement.
- In addition, the support of Key Stage Assistants to the programme for the Gifted and Talented pupils is increasing their enjoyment and standards. They would not be able to attend 'master classes' if it were not for the effective deployment of the wider workforce.

Leadership and management of reforming and developing the workforce

Leadership and management of the strategy are good.

- Senior leaders have a good understanding of and commitment to the principles of workforce reform and development.
- The school has made good progress in implementing all phases of the workload agreement and has a clear, carefully planned strategy for implementing PPA time.
- There are good arrangements to ensure that middle managers have dedicated time to fulfil their leadership and management responsibilities. The school rightly emphasises the use of this time for monitoring teaching and learning and the increased analysis of pupil performance data.
- The data manager has made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in the school, by providing them with the data they need to analyse pupils' progress and the effectiveness of teaching.

Impact on training and managing a reformed workforce

- The school has successfully developed a number of inclusive systems, for example, for the performance management and continuous professional development of all staff. Teaching assistants feel valued and some are involved in additional training, which could lead eventually to qualified teacher status. The school is actively supporting this.

Impact on inclusion

The impact of the strategy on provision for inclusion is good.

- A key improvement has been in inclusion. Pupils' progress is tracked rigorously and booster groups support targeted pupils very effectively. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to these.
- Careful consideration is given to the deployment of teaching assistants to support vulnerable children, especially those with physical disabilities. The

school nurse was mentioned by pupils as helpful: they appreciate her 'drop-in' sessions.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- consider the full range of talents that the wider workforce offers. Some have life experience and counselling skills, for example, that could be developed to extend their usefulness to the school and to pupils
- enable senior managers to have leadership time away from the school to reflect and plan without the daily pressures and stresses of day-to-day management.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to reform and develop the school workforce.

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 Cosway
Additional Inspector