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Mr P Bunn
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Dear Mr Bunn

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Attendance for Learning in Secondary Schools

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 November 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 representatives from the local authority, staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of your work in promoting attendance was judged to be good; attendance is satisfactory and rising.

Achievement and standards

- Achievement and standards are satisfactory and improving.
- Standards achieved by pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 were similar to those achieved by pupils nationally in 2005. There was a significant rise in pupils achieving 5 or more A*- C in GCSEs including English and maths from 37% in 2004 to 55% in 2005. Progress made by pupils between Key Stages 2 to 4 is satisfactory and improving. Similarly attendance at school is showing a steady increase over the past few years.
- The school analyses data effectively, making sensible links between attendance and attainment. Heads of year and form tutors also check ongoing attendance and achievement of pupils. This good system highlights anyone who is not making expected progress. The links between attendance and achievement are not as well analysed by subject leaders and teachers.

- Pupils have a good understanding of the link between attendance and achievement. They are very familiar with their own attendance targets and good displays highlight when absence levels put achievement at risk.
- Particular programmes have been effective for example, group work to encourage motivation with pupils who had poor attendance and personalised curriculum plans for some pupils in Key Stage 4. Both programmes resulted in the pupils reducing their absence rates and as a result their academic progress improved. The staff mentoring system for Key Stage 4 pupils is also effective in improving progress.
- Throughout the visit behaviour was good. Pupils were thoughtful about their own experiences of school and able to express their views clearly and appropriately.

Quality of teaching and learning in relation to attendance

- Teaching and learning were satisfactory although some good practice was also observed.
- Strategies used by teachers to find out the level of understanding by pupils were of variable quality. In some good practice, teachers ensured they asked challenging questions and required more explanation from pupils than a basic answer. Many pupils had a good understanding of the level of work they were achieving and how they could make improvements.
- Pupils were usually purposefully involved in learning but when the pace of the lesson was too rapid or did not challenge them suitably the amount of progress made was reduced. Pupils interviewed commented that lessons were improving but they would still like more that kept them actively involved.

Quality of curriculum in relation to attendance

- The curriculum on offer to pupils is good.
- There is sufficient flexibility in Key Stage 4 to enable the school to organise personalised packages for pupils who are not motivated by the standard school curriculum. The plans include access to lessons that ensure pupils achieve the basic skills necessary for their future lives.
- The school provides good opportunities for project work across subject areas and these are highly motivating for pupils.

Leadership and management in relation to attendance

- Leadership and management for improving attendance are good.
- The school has given improving attendance a very high profile and has made clear links between attendance and achievement. This has been very effectively communicated to pupils and parents. As a result attendance continues to rise. The school has not worked with other local schools to establish similar expectations.
- From a difficult starting point with insufficient data, systems have been established and the school now analyses the data available effectively.

However, there are still some gaps in the information available, for example, attendance in subjects and any common characteristics of pupils with lower attendance.

- Heads of Year take on responsibility for the good and regular monitoring of attendance and play a key part in leading the agenda for meetings with the school education welfare officer.
- Through good links with performance management and challenging targets governors and senior managers ensure improvements are being made.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is satisfactory with aspects that are good.
- There has been a good reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions each year for the past three years.
- There is a good range of initiatives to help individuals with different needs improve their attendance at school.
- All the pupils interviewed during the inspection felt safe and none reported bullying as a reason for not attending school.
- There is not a structured approach to help pupils who have been absent from school catch up with the work missed.
- The analysis of data on pupils who are in the different categories for attendance informs action for individuals and small groups but is not yet sophisticated enough to inform more whole school or subject initiatives.

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

- establish a coordinated system to ensure pupils who are absent from school are given the help they require to catch up with the work missed
- use more rigorous data analysis to inform the development of whole school and subject based initiatives with information gained from pupils views.

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

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector