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Mr Ashton
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Dear Mr Ashton

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 May 2007 to look at work in the Primary National Strategies.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the strategies, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of Assessment for Learning (AfL).

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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the national strategies is judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in English is good. The impact of AfL on pupils' achievement and personal development is also good.

- Standards are significantly above average in English and pupils' progress is good. Progress has been in the top 40% nationally in each of the previous three years.

- Vulnerable groups of pupils perform well. Pupils who enter the school with below average ability in reading and writing receive effective support and make good progress.
- In the few lessons where teachers do not fully apply the principles of AfL, progress is slower.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are keen to learn. They respond well to opportunities to work collaboratively.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good. The impact of AfL on teaching and learning is also good.

- Pupils make good progress in most lessons because learning is purposeful and activities are skilfully matched to meet their needs.
- Assessment and monitoring procedures, based on national strategy principles, have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in English.
- Pupils speak positively about the guidance provided by teachers.
- Progress is slower when teachers consistently seek answers from a limited number of pupils who raise their hands.
- Pupils are unsure how their individual targets will help them improve.

Quality of curriculum

The English curriculum is good as is the impact of AfL on the curriculum.

- Pupils enjoy English. Whole class reading and writing narratives were particularly popular.
- Most marking helps pupils to improve their work and there are good examples of self assessment.
- English skills and understanding are well integrated into other subjects across the curriculum.
- Sometimes too much time is spent on punctuation exercises and this limits time for other essential work.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in English are good. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of AfL is also good.

- The English subject leader has a good understanding of the subject's strengths and weaknesses. With strong support from the senior leadership team, she ensures that AfL is developed to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching.
- Assessment data is analysed effectively to monitor trends in performance. The school has good plans to use end of term assessments to help identify strengths and areas for development in teaching and the curriculum.

- The senior leadership team have promoted AfL as central to their plans for raising achievement. Since the introduction of the strategies they have carefully selected aspects that support and develop this vision.
- Senior leaders conduct rigorous audits of AfL to monitor and evaluate the implementation of AfL and to promote consistency.

Assessment for Learning

The impact of AfL overall is good.

- Assessment for learning has contributed successfully to the raising of achievement. The impact of AfL on the quality of teaching and learning leads to pupils' good progress.
- Throughout the school, conditions for learning are based on high learning expectations.
- The commitment to AfL has had a positive impact on the pupils' personal development. The pupils are confident, enjoy working collaboratively and are ready to take greater responsibility for their learning.

Inclusion

The impact of AfL on inclusion is good.

- All groups achieve well. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and barriers to progress removed.
- The school provides effective support for pupils at risk of underachievement for emotional or behavioural reasons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that in English pupils have a greater awareness of their individual targets and how they can help them improve their work
- improving questioning strategies so that they encourage pupils to think and enable teachers to assess learning more accurately.

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

Anthony O'Malley
Her Majesty's Inspector