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Mr R Jones  
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the Secondary National Strategy

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 June 2007 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key area of the SNS in English 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the SNS in English was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in English is inadequate overall. The impact of AfL is inadequate.

- Standards in English are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress by the end of Key Stage 3 but inadequate progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

- Pupils' progress in the eight lessons observed was satisfactory overall. However, the progress in some lessons was unsatisfactory because pupils were insufficiently challenged or teaching lacked focus.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning were satisfactory overall and good in some lessons. Pupils' behaviour was mostly good and they were generally willing to learn, including in paired and group activities.
- Some aspects of AfL are not yet consistently embedded across all lessons and have therefore had limited impact on pupils' learning.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory overall. The impact of assessment for learning is inadequate.

- Teachers have sound subject knowledge. Objectives are highlighted at the start of the lesson, but they often describe tasks to be completed, rather than the learning that will take place.
- The better lessons had clear learning objectives, high expectations of pupils' achievement and appropriate challenge, matched to the ability of the class. Pupils reflected on their learning, evaluated their work and made improvements. Teachers used their strong relationships with the class to motivate and challenge pupils.
- In the less effective lessons, teachers did not have a good grasp of pupils' starting points and offered insufficient challenge. Group work and paired activities lacked structure and time limits were not enforced to ensure that pupils stayed on task.
- Planning is variable and insufficiently rigorous in specifying exactly what pupils will learn and how they will improve their skills.
- The quality of marking is variable. In many cases work is not marked or marking is inconsistent. Where it is better, pupils receive a clear judgement on their work, current and target grades, and comments to support improvement. Pupils rarely respond to teachers' comments or apply the suggestions in subsequent work.
- About half of the lessons observed contained AfL approaches such as the use of grade criteria to evaluate work. However, in some cases, pupils displayed insufficient understanding of the criteria. There were no examples of challenging questions to make suitable demands of pupils' thinking.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the English curriculum is satisfactory. The impact of AfL on the curriculum is inadequate.

- The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. Statutory requirements are met.
- Schemes of work are adequate. They provide a useful starting point for teaching but do not meet the needs of all pupils. The initiative to

develop boys' speaking and listening skills to support their writing skills is appropriate but its impact on learning has yet to be evaluated.

- Some key aspects of the SNS are in place to support teaching and learning in English, notably the three part lesson, the presentation of lesson objectives and, in some cases, the involvement of pupils in assessing their own progress and that of others.
- Electronic whiteboards are available in most classrooms, though they are not yet used effectively.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory. Leadership and management of AfL are inadequate.

- Key issues for improvement have been identified following analysis of performance data but these have not yet been formalised within a development plan.
- Policy statements on marking and personalised learning are too broad and as a consequence, difficult to monitor.
- Staff training is adequate. A residency by the English consultant has been effective but its impact on practice has not been evaluated.
- The systematic analysis and interpretation of data is developing. The progress of individual pupils is monitored, and the department is starting to look at the progress of specific groups.
- Learning and teaching in lessons is monitored by senior staff and the head of department. However, the information is not collated systematically to inform developments within the department or the department plan.

## Assessment for learning

The impact of AfL overall is inadequate.

- Whole school initiatives on the development of teaching and learning, including assessment for learning, are under review. The school does not have a current policy on teaching and learning and there is no whole school marking policy.
- Work that the school had previously undertaken on literacy across the curriculum is being revisited and AfL has been identified as key focus for the whole school from September 2007.
- While some elements of AfL were demonstrated in lessons, these are not yet embedded in practice, nor is there evidence that they are making a difference.
- Written feedback to pupils in English is inconsistent and in some cases unsatisfactory.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory. The impact of AfL on inclusion is inadequate.

- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), make satisfactory progress overall. The progress of boys has been identified by the school as an area for development.
- Setting and banding arrangements are being reviewed. Lower ability groups contain mostly boys.
- The school makes adequate use of intervention programmes. Specialist teaching assistants provide effective and flexible support. However, teachers' planning does not identify specific targets for individuals or groups with LDD.
- The monitoring of pupils is satisfactory. The improved analysis of data identifies those who fall behind or fail to meet targets and results in appropriate intervention.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that the departmental development plan prioritises the improvement of teaching and learning in order to raise standards
- develop further the analysis and interpretation of data to better inform planning and teaching
- ensure that interventions and projects are evaluated to assess their impact on teaching and learning
- establish an agreed marking policy across the department which supports and challenges all pupils.

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

Mary Ryan  
Her Majesty's Inspector