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Mr Merideth
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Dear Mr Merideth

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 4 - 5 November 2007 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the SNS, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of Assessment for learning (AfL) and quality of programmes for disengaged/disaffected pupils.

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 was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

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

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are good and they are satisfactory at the end of Key Stage 3.
- All groups of pupils make good progress in mathematics, especially at Key 4.

- Pupils make better progress in mathematics than is the case in most other subjects in the school.
- Pupils' good progress makes an important contribution to the positive attitudes they have about the subject and the good behaviour observed.

Quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

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

- Teachers are very good at matching work to pupils' needs.
- Pupils are consistently required to explain how they arrived at a particular solution and this contributes to their good achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- In the very best lessons teachers' skilful questions increased the involvement of all pupils and encouraged deeper thought. In these lessons, pupils listened well to each other and built on what others had said.
- Starter activities consistently grab pupils' attention; work is well matched to pupils' abilities; and pupils make informed choices. These aspects promote good achievement and contribute to pupils' personal development.
- Teachers plan lessons effectively in response to their evaluation of learning and regular formal testing. However, learning is not effectively reviewed at different points during lessons.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and extends pupils' learning through statistics and adult numeracy courses.
- Information, and communication technology engages pupils' interest.
- Schemes of work support teachers' planning for pupils of different abilities.
- Target setting and assessment is implemented well in mathematics.
- Examination questions are used frequently to improve literacy and to provide increased opportunities for pupils to apply their learning. However, insufficient links are currently made to other subjects and the real world in general.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Effective leadership has raised the status of mathematics and has ensured the existence of a stable team dedicated to ensuring all pupils achieve well.
- The mathematics department builds effectively on achievements in the primary phase.
- Although there has been limited support from Local Authority (LA) consultants in mathematics, the school has effectively implemented key developments related to the National Strategies.
- The school is well aware of the strengths in the mathematics department and is using these to raise standards elsewhere.
- The school has good plans to further develop links between mathematics lessons and applications in the real world.

Assessment for learning

The impact of AfL is good.

- The department very effectively identifies the level at which pupils are working and matches teaching accurately.
- A systematic analysis of pupils' work and tests helps to amend lessons and target additional support.
- Good feedback is provided to enable pupils to achieve and sometimes exceed their targets. Targets are used less effectively with younger pupils.
- Questioning consistently requires pupils to share their thinking but is not always successful in ensuring all learners are fully engaged. Self and peer assessment is less well developed.

The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils

The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils is good.

- The rate of progress of disaffected pupils and their personal development is good overall. Attendance has improved and absence and exclusion rates are low. The school's internal inclusion unit ensures both fixed and permanent exclusions are well below the LA average.
- Additional support is carefully directed as a result of the department's accurate assessments.
- The school has a comprehensive range of support that includes learning mentors and external agencies.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has alternative courses that meet the needs of the pupils most at risk.
- The school offers a relatively small number of vocational courses, although more are planned.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- develop further the use of questions so more pupils take greater responsibility for their own learning
- improve links with other subjects and beyond school so that pupils see the relevance of mathematics and have greater opportunity to apply their mathematical thinking
- build on the high expectations of pupils' achievement in mathematics.

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

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector