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Mrs Ann Winter  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Winter

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 27 - 28 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 the 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 in English is satisfactory overall. The impact of AfL on students' achievement and personal development is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory overall.

- Standards in English are average at Key Stage 3 and below average at Key Stage 4.

- Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 but they make slower progress at Key Stage 4.
- Students' progress was at least satisfactory in all lessons observed, in some lessons it was good.
- Students have good attitudes to learning overall and in some lessons they are very good. They are attentive, responsive, and behave well. Many talk confidently about their work.
- Aspects of the National Strategies have had particular impact on students' learning at Key Stage 3.

### Quality of teaching and learning in English

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan thoroughly.
- The best lessons observed in English had clear objectives; good planning which generated interesting activities; very good relationships; crisp pace; and appropriate challenge to students' learning. In these lessons, the teacher had high expectations and knew what needed to be achieved over a series of lessons.
- Where lessons were satisfactory, teachers' expectations of the pace and amount of work to be completed were insufficiently high. There was insufficient challenge for students and some lost concentration.
- In all the lessons observed, teachers used AfL strategies well to support teaching and learning.

### Quality of curriculum

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

- Subject plans provide a useful framework for teachers' planning, but opportunities for staff to share examples of their planning could be increased.
- Students say that they enjoy English and are well supported by their teachers.
- Guidance to the staff on the delivery of the curriculum and teaching and learning is comprehensive.
- Interactive whiteboards are used creatively to support teaching and learning.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management in English are good. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of AfL on achievement in English is satisfactory.

- The school's senior leadership team and the subject leader for English have assessed accurately the areas of strength and weakness in this subject and all activities are focused on raising achievement.
- The subject leader for English provides good and highly committed leadership. The departmental self-review is comprehensive. Clear issues for action are identified and evaluation procedures are good.
- The school and the department have rightly targeted resources and support from the local authority on improving performance at Key Stage 4, building on the significant progress made at Key Stage 3.

### Assessment for learning

The impact of AfL in English is good.

- There is a clear whole school policy and guidance for AfL which is very strongly focused on raising achievement.
- Features of assessment for learning observed in lessons included: the sharing of learning objectives with the class; effective questioning; good use of group and pair work; and a range of strategies to assess students' learning during the lesson.
- The marking of students' work in English is good and in some cases very good.
- Student progress is tracked well, with very close monitoring of the progress of current Year 11.

### The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils

The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils is good.

- Students at risk of disaffection are identified early in Key Stage 3 and supported through a variety of programmes by the school's flexible learning centre and inclusion manager.
- All students have access to the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, (SEAL) programme to enhance self esteem and develop positive approaches to learning.
- Teaching assistants with a specific remit for intervention, work with identified students in each core subject faculty; SNS literacy intervention programmes are used as appropriate for individuals and groups.
- At Key Stage 4 the introduction of a more flexible curriculum for disaffected and vulnerable young people has had a demonstrable impact on their confidence and self-esteem.

The areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards at Key Stage 4 through continuing review of teaching strategies and the curriculum offer.

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

Mary Ryan  
Her Majesty's Inspector