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Mr D Shevill
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shevill

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 04 – 05 March 2008 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the National Strategy, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of intervention strategies 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, observation of five part lessons and a number of intervention sessions.

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in English is inadequate. The impact of intervention strategies on pupils' achievement and personal development is satisfactory.

- In 2007, standards at the end of Year 11 were low and students made inadequate progress from their starting points. At Year 9, standards were below average and students made satisfactory progress.
- The progress made by boys is of concern at both key stages.

- The intervention strategies used to support Year 9 through booster and revision sessions had satisfactory impact.
- Some Year 11 students entered GCSE English in November 2007 and this has had a positive impact with many achieving their target grade.
- In the lessons observed, students made generally satisfactory progress. They worked well together and listened attentively.

Quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory as is the impact of intervention strategies on teaching.

- Teachers have sound subject knowledge and lessons are adequately planned. However, learning objectives are occasionally expressed as tasks.
- Teachers do not plan carefully enough to match work to students' different levels of ability and miss opportunities to engage them at an appropriate level. In most classes students complete the same work.
- Teachers encourage students to work in pairs or groups but this does not always lead to effective answers to questions, with too many students not offering or being challenged to answer. As a result, discussion is underdeveloped.
- Teachers' marking is positive and gives clear advice to students on how to improve their work.
- There is a satisfactory range of intervention strategies, especially in Key Stage 3. These are used effectively in small withdrawal groups, within lessons in Year 7, with Year 9 in large events and as part of the booster programme.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory as is the impact of intervention strategies in the curriculum.

- Curriculum planning meets National Curriculum requirements. Schemes of work give generally appropriate guidance on assessment and teaching approaches.
- Recent amendments to the curriculum to allow early entry to GCSE English for some Year 11 and all Year 10 students are positive and the first results indicate that many have reached their target grade.
- The Year 7 integrated studies course is in its early stages but focuses on improving literacy and learning.
- Literacy progress units are planned into the Year 7 course and used with smaller groups in Years 8 and 9. The specific booster and revision programmes have had satisfactory impact on achievement and will run again in 2008.

Leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are inadequate but improving as more directed and consistent approaches are adopted. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of intervention strategies is satisfactory.

- Subject self evaluation lacks detailed analysis of student outcomes, especially at Key Stage 4. As a result, the identification of key areas for action is insufficiently precise.
- Subject development and action plans contain some relevant steps to bring about improvement but lack sufficient detail and measurable success criteria.
- Although there are subject policies for teaching and learning, practice in classrooms is variable and has not yet led to students making sufficient progress by the end of Year 11.
- The leadership and management of intervention strategies are satisfactory, particularly in Key Stage 3.

Intervention strategies

The impact of intervention strategies in English is satisfactory.

- There is a satisfactory range of intervention for those students in the target group, involving some literacy progress units delivered through the Year 7 integrated studies course and others through withdrawal groups. These are well supported by a varied and flexible range of other interventions for students with weaker literacy skills.
- Withdrawal sessions are well organised and appropriately taught by trained staff. In 2007, intervention strategies had a satisfactory impact on achievement in Year 9.

The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils

The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils is good.

- There is a broad and flexible range of programmes for students at risk of disaffection, especially at Key Stage 4. These are well organised and skilfully co-ordinated to ensure that they meet students' needs.
- The systems for assessing students' needs, co-ordinating provision and tracking progress are good.
- Programmes such as the alternative curriculum courses are very highly valued by the students involved who say that their attendance and achievement is much improved. They lead to a valuable set of qualifications and have reduced the proportion of students not engaged in education or training after 16.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers plan carefully to match learning objectives to students' areas of weakness and vary work in lessons accordingly
- developing action plans based on detailed analysis of students' performance and evaluating progress against measurable success criteria
- ensuring that there are clear links between what students learn in intervention sessions and their main English lessons.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector