

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



12 November 2008

Mr N Walker
Headteacher
Benfield School
Benfield Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE6 4NU

Dear Mr Walker

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Workforce Reform: has it made a difference?

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 10 November 2008 to evaluate the impact of the deployment, training and development of the wider workforce. For the purposes of this survey inspection, the term 'wider workforce' will apply to any person employed by or working in partnership with the school who is not a qualified teacher.

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 discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the wider workforce in your school was judged to be good.

The impact of the wider workforce on achievement and standards is good.

- The wider workforce comprises teams of staff with specific roles and responsibilities. All have a firm focus on raising standards and students' achievement. The support they give provides valuable time for teachers to focus on improving students learning and releases senior teachers from administrative tasks in order to spend more time in the classroom.
- Members of the wider workforce have contributed to a marked improvement in examination results and in students' achievement. Recent

appointments of specialist literacy and numeracy assistants are well planned to strengthen the contribution of the wider workforce.

- Intervention from higher level teaching assistants and learning support assistants enables most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make satisfactory progress and some, especially those with a statement of special need, to make good progress. Students who have recently joined the school and whose first language is not English were particularly appreciative of the specialist help they have had in improving their spoken English which has enabled them to achieve success in tests and examinations.
- The work of the wider workforce and particularly the inclusion manager has resulted in improvements in behaviour and in a downward trend in the number of fixed term exclusions. Students generally behave well in the calm and well organised environment of the inclusion unit and complete worthwhile work which raises standards and gives them a sense of achievement. Although attendance remains stubbornly below average members of the wider workforce are using every possible strategy to improve these figures. The support given to all students and in particular to those who are disaffected or at risk of exclusion has raised their self esteem and increased their enjoyment of school.

The impact of the wider workforce on the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- In all of the four part-lessons seen members of the wider workforce were making a valuable contribution towards students' progress. Teaching assistants give students constructive individual support encouraging them to achieve well. They convey high expectations of behaviour and relationships are very good.
- Teaching assistants meet with teachers to plan lessons and are well informed about the individual needs of their students. They work well together to ensure students have continuity in their learning and the support and intervention they receive is effective.
- Cover supervision is well organised and has resulted in classes being better managed and standards and achievement improving. Long term cover arrangements by members of the wider workforce, who are developing specialist skills and subject knowledge, have improved continuity of learning and ensure school routines are applied consistently.

The impact of the wider workforce on the quality of the curriculum is good.

- Specialist coaches are used effectively to develop the skills of gifted and talented students so they can take part in competitive sports at all levels.
- Members of the wider workforce make a major contribution to extra-curricular activities by running a range of sporting and musical activities, and attending residential visits and trips. Their presence often allows physically disabled students to take part in extra-curricular activities which they enjoy greatly.
- Members of the wider workforce run sessions to help students with coursework and homework. One student spoke warmly of the extra help

she had received in mathematics and science which enabled her to aim for a high grade in these subjects.

The leadership and management of the wider workforce are good.

- You, your deputy headteachers and senior leaders are committed to training and developing the wider workforce at all levels. There are well established performance management procedures in place and all members of the wider workforce have access to good quality training linked, where appropriate, to the school's priorities for improvement.
- The wider workforce feel valued and most are clear about their roles and responsibilities. However, the roles of the welfare assistants could be developed further to increase their autonomy and maximise their impact on students' achievement and personal development.
- There is a clear line management structure in place. Most line managers of the wider workforce understand their roles well and are firmly focused on raising standards. However, the school recognises the need for more effective monitoring of the work of the learning support assistants to fully evaluate their impact on students' achievement.
- Since the introduction of workforce reform there has been a measurable saving on staffing costs for the school because of the effective deployment of the wider workforce, particularly the cover supervisors.

The impact of the wider workforce on inclusion is good.

- This is a very inclusive school and members of the wider workforce contribute significantly to this. Very good support is provided by the wider workforce for vulnerable groups of students which enables them to achieve their potential.
- A range of students, including some with English as an additional language, some with physical disabilities and others at risk of not completing their education successfully, spoke enthusiastically of the help they had received from learning support assistants, the progression coach and many other members of the wider workforce.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- monitor more effectively the impact of the work of learning support assistants
- develop the roles of welfare assistants to increase their autonomy and maximise their impact on students achievement and personal development.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to train and develop the wider workforce.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ann Wallis
Additional Inspector