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Dr Atkins
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Dear Dr Atkins

Ofsted survey programme visit - National Strategies survey 2008-09

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 December 2008 to look at the impact of the National Strategies on raising standards and narrowing the attainment gap.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit focused on the work of the National Strategies in improving outcomes for children and young people. The visit focused particularly on the school's view of the impact of the National Strategies and how this is evaluated.

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 schools 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 outcomes of the visit included interviews with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior staff, teachers and students. Three part-lessons were observed. Relevant documentation was scrutinised.

The leadership team considers that the Secondary National Strategy together with other actions taken by the school has played a part in improving outcomes for students. They feel the strategy has had a positive impact on teaching and learning, and report improvements in teachers' use of assessment to promote learning and the use of information communication technology (ICT) to support learning in other subjects. They also feel that the strategy to promote how teachers use and develop students' literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects has played a part in improving standards. The school is involved in other improvement initiatives as well as the National Strategy and they find the relative impact of the different initiatives difficult to determine. For example, rising standards in mathematics at the end of Year 11 is identified as being in

part due to National Strategy initiatives and in part due to stability in mathematics staffing, sports college initiatives and extra revision and support classes run by teachers. However, the leadership team more easily identified that the support and advice of the behaviour and attendance consultant had been central to the school's successful work to improve attendance.

The lessons observed and the students spoken with during this visit provided evidence of the impact of the strategy on the quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are planned well around clear learning outcomes. These are routinely shared with students in order to focus their learning. However, teachers do not always fully check that students understand these objectives hence the influence of the use of objectives on learning is diminished. In some lessons effective use is made of questioning to check and develop learning although this good practice is not yet consistent across the school. The lessons observed contained activities that actively involved students in their learning. However, the leadership team acknowledge that strategies to involve students in assessing their own work and that of their peers are not yet fully in place across the school.

The school was last inspected in January 2007 and standards were judged to be average and achievement satisfactory. Through a range of initiatives, including the National Strategy, the leadership team has made some progress in raising standards in the school since this time. For example, the percentage of students attaining 5 or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics improved between 2006 and 2008. Standards in mathematics have also improved and are now above average. The school's need to improve standards in English and raise boys' achievement were identified in the school improvement partner's report written in September 2007. However, the success of initiatives to address these issues has been limited. Standards in English at the end of Year 11 have remained significantly below the national average for the past three years and the difference in the percentage of boys and girls attaining 5 or more A* to C grades rose to twenty percentage points in 2008. There was also some difference in the progress made by different groups of students. For example, students on the special educational needs register at school action made less progress than their peers.

I hope you find this feedback useful.

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

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector