

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6855  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Lewis  
Headteacher  
King Solomon High School  
Forest Road  
Barkingside  
Ilford  
Essex  
IG6 3HB

Dear Mr Lewis

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 with Paul Scott AI on 10 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, Strategy Manager, other senior staff, teachers and students. Three part-lessons were observed. Relevant documentation was scrutinised.

The leadership team report that relationships and communication with the local authority's National Strategies team are very productive. They feel consultant support is very effective and that this has been an important factor in improving outcomes for students. They particularly identified the behaviour and attendance and mathematics strands of the strategy allied with good consultant support as having a positive impact on improvements in behaviour across the school and standards in mathematics. A large fall in the school's exclusion rate provides evidence of the impact of behavioural strategies. The Secondary National Strategy is also identified as having played an important part in improving teaching and learning, particularly teachers' use of assessment to support learning. Although the leadership team readily

acknowledge the positive impact of the strategy they also feel that other actions initiated by the school have had an impact on improving provision and outcomes for students. For example, internal processes of monitoring and quality assurance have been developed to be more systematic and rigorous and they feel this is ensuring a greater consistency of good practice across the school.

During this visit, the lessons observed and the conversations with students and teachers provided evidence that the National Strategy was having a positive impact on teaching and learning. Lessons are planned around learning objectives and these are routinely shared with students. When these objectives and success criteria are clearly explained and understood by students this focuses the lesson on learning and has a positive impact on their progress. However, this good practice is not yet consistently in place across the school. A range of strategies are also being used to actively engage students in learning. Effective questioning was used well in the lessons observed to check and develop learning. This aspect of teaching and learning has been a recent National Strategy focus within the school. In the lessons observed students behaved well and had good attitudes to learning. However, students report that although behaviour has improved some lessons are still disrupted by low levels of student misbehaviour.

Analysis of the school's test and examination results provides a generally positive but mixed picture as to the impact of the National Strategy on raising standards and narrowing the attainment gap. The percentage of Year 11 students attaining five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics has been above average for the past three years and improved to be significantly above average in 2008. Standards particularly improved in mathematics and the school attributes this in large part to the impact of the National Strategy consultant support. However, standards in English have declined over the past two years and were at the national average in 2008.

The overall progress made by students between Year 7 and Year 11 as measured by contextual value added is high and student achievement in a number of subjects is at least good. However, the progress of students in English has not been so strong particularly for the most able. The progress made by students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language is similar to all other students.

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