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Ms J Peacock
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Peacock

Ofsted survey inspection programme – New models of school leadership: influences and outcomes

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, pupils, parents and governors, during my visits to the schools within the West Exmoor Federation on 12 and 13 January 2009 to evaluate the impact of new models of leadership on school improvement.

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 governors, staff, pupils, parents, a scrutiny of relevant documentation and a lesson observation.

The overall effectiveness of the model of leadership, a federation of three primary schools with one executive headteacher and one governing body, is good.

The impact of the model of leadership on achievement and standards is good.

- There are effective common systems for assessment and tracking of pupils' progress and standards across the federation that demonstrate the federation is successfully increasing the percentage of pupils who are working at the level appropriate for their age.
- In 2008, no pupils attained the highest level in writing at the end of Key Stage 1. Historically, writing has been an area of comparative

weakness across the federation. Evidence from exercise books and data collated by senior leaders shows the federation's focus on improving writing is raising pupils' achievement in this area.

- Pupils at all schools are delighted with the improved opportunities they now have to socialise with a wider range of peers. Several noted they have made new friends from the federation's other schools. They realised that several of these new friends will move with them to secondary school and this is reducing pupils' anxieties about the next phase in their education.

The impact of the model of leadership on the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Senior leaders have a comprehensive and accurate view of the quality of teaching across the federation which is reported at termly intervals to governors. Teachers noted a strong emphasis on improving teaching methods and noted the federation has enabled them to discuss strategies for teaching and learning with a wider group of colleagues.
- Teachers work in small federation teams to plan work for particular year groups and key stages. The joint planning that results is well focused and appropriately geared to pupils' differing skills and ability levels.
- Pupils have targets for English, mathematics and, more recently science. These targets pinpoint the steps required to build their knowledge or skills. Year 6 pupils across the federation said they find these targets useful in finding out how well they are doing and what they need to do next.

The impact of the model of leadership on the quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is very tightly planned across the federation. This ensures that pupils do not experience unnecessary repetition of content during each key stage.
- Detailed planning ensures pupils' skills are progressively developed as they move through the school. Curriculum planning is securely underpinned by the National Curriculum.
- Some parents remarked positively upon the curriculum, and pupils enthused about the school trips they experience with their peers from other federation schools. These valuable opportunities for outdoor learning have yet to be tied fully into curriculum planning across the federation.
- Several parents noted they would appreciate a regular synopsis of the work their children are doing in each curriculum area each term so they can support their children's learning out of school more effectively.
- A number of parents were particularly impressed with the good arrangements for setting and marking homework across the federation.

The impact of the model of leadership on the quality of leadership and management throughout the school is good.

- Leadership is increasingly well distributed across the federation. There are valuable opportunities for staff to develop and hone their leadership skills across the three schools. Several staff noted the possibility of working across three schools and the consequent development opportunities helps retain staff for longer periods.
- The executive headteacher has taken the day to day lead on monitoring achievement and standards through performance data. Heads of teaching and learning at each school have a more limited view of this area.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning by senior staff is very strong across the federation. Teachers receive pertinent feedback on their performance.
- Parents and pupils have great clarity about the different roles of the executive headteacher and heads of teaching and learning. Although a few parents miss having their 'own' headteacher, they acknowledge that senior staff deal with any issues very quickly. Many parents commented on the high frequency of newsletters which are well tailored to each school.
- The federation has a strong and committed governing body which receives detailed reports each term from the executive headteacher on achievement and standards and teaching and learning. However, there is little evidence from the minutes of the governing body's curriculum committee that governors are discussing performance trends in depth.
- Several parents noted that they would like to know more about the work of governors in supporting the federation and in holding it to account.

The impact of the model of leadership on inclusion is good.

- The federation has provided vulnerable pupils with greater opportunities to mix with a wider range of pupils, and thus build their confidence.
- Boys have historically not performed at expected levels in writing. However, one parent now reports staff have 'bent over backwards' to give her son the help he needs to improve. One teacher reports, that as a result of the new focus in this area, boys in her class are enjoying writing for the first time.
- Pupils at risk of exclusion have benefited from managed moves between the federation's schools.
- The assessment of early reading, including phonics, is variable across the federation and thus it is difficult to focus accurate early intervention in this essential area.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- providing parents with a regular synopsis of the work their children are doing in each curriculum area each term to ensure they are able to support their children's learning out of school
- increasing the capacity of heads of teaching and learning to monitor pupils' achievement and standards through performance data
- widening the skills base of the governors' curriculum committee to ensure performance trends are regularly discussed and leaders are challenged if necessary
- updating parents on the work of the governing body in supporting the federation and in holding it to account
- improving the assessment of individual pupils' phonic skills so that early intervention may be more effectively targeted.

I hope these observations are useful to you as you continue to develop the federation.

A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be made available to the team who conduct your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons
Her Majesty's Inspector