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Mr G Tucker  
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Dear Mr Tucker

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 13 January 2009 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 school has a positive relationship with the local authority strategy team and the support from consultants is highly valued. The leadership team report that National Strategy initiatives allied with effective consultant support have played an important part in raising standards within the school. The use of a wide range of intervention strategies, assessment to support learning and improved use of data to identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum planning, teaching and learning are identified as being strategies that have helped drive improvement. The leadership team also acknowledge that the strategies clear focus on improving teaching and learning with good support materials has led to more consistent practice within the school. However, the leadership team find it difficult to determine the relative impact of the

National Strategy compared with other initiatives such as specialist school work to develop the use of information communication technology (ICT) and the virtual learning environment on improving standards.

The impact of the National Strategies on teaching and learning and the use of assessment was evident in the three part-lessons observed. Lessons were planned around clear learning outcomes for students. These learning outcomes were routinely shared with students to focus learning although teachers did not always ensure that these were fully understood. Some effective questioning that carefully explored and developed students learning was observed although this good practice was not consistent across all the lessons. Interactive teaching strategies that actively engaged students in learning were seen in all the lessons observed and the behaviour of students was good. In one lesson students were given the opportunity to assess each others' work and this contributed significantly to their learning. The students spoken to during this visit were also aware of their target grades or levels and how well they were doing. Not all were equally clear about what they needed to do to improve. Interactive white boards were used well in two lessons to engage students, aid learning and maintain a good pace to the lesson. Students also reported that they regularly used ICT in lessons, particularly in mathematics, and this helped them learn.

The leadership team's positive view of the strategies is reflected in the good progress made by students in Years 7 to 9. Students enter the school with standards similar to the national average. At the end of Year 9 standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Standards at the end of Year 11 improved greatly in 2008 and are now above average. This group of students made good progress between Years 7 and 11. There was however, some variation in the progress made by different groups of boys. For example the progress of less able boys, particularly those on the special educational needs register at school action plus, was not as strong as their peers.

I hope you find this feedback useful.

Ofsted gathers information on the immediate and longer-term impact of survey inspections, both on the institutions themselves, and with a view to improving its own processes. To this end, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire and return it within the next ten days. We have also just sent a copy of the questionnaire by email. Please return your completed questionnaire to either the email or postal address on the form, not to me. We may also contact some schools by telephone after several months in order for us to gain a picture of longer-term impact. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

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