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Mr K McKellar  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr McKellar

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 14 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, deputy headteacher, other senior staff, teachers and students. Three part-lessons were observed. Relevant documentation was scrutinised.

The National Strategy initiative identified by the leadership team as having the greatest impact on improving the climate for learning and achievement is the programme for developing students' social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL). This work has been very effectively supported by the local authority's behaviour and attendance consultant. Although the support provided by most consultants is also viewed positively, the leadership team identify that there is variation in the effectiveness of the National Strategy consultants. The leadership team also identify that the strategy has led to improvements in teaching and learning and the use of assessment to support learning. National Strategy intervention programmes and initiatives to promote how teachers use and develop students' literacy skills across all subjects are seen as having played a part in improving standards. However,

the school was clear that other non-strategy initiatives such as improved monitoring and evaluation, specialist school work and an improved curriculum have also had a positive impact on achievement. The school's journey of improvement over the past few years indicates that the key to success has been effective and strong leadership and management. The ability to select and tailor specific initiatives to meet the needs of students within the school has been central to the improvement process.

The impact of the SEAL programme was evident in the good and outstanding behaviour seen in the lessons observed. During the group work undertaken in all three lessons, students were sensitive to the views and needs of others and this ensured that these activities effectively enabled them to share and develop their learning. The impact of the SEAL programme is also seen in the improving attendance of students. During one lesson, excellent questioning was observed that very carefully checked and developed students learning. However, this good practice is not yet consistent across the school. All the lessons observed contained activities that fully engaged students in learning and were pitched at the appropriate level for them. Students reported that they were sometimes given opportunities to assess their own work and that of their peers and this aided their learning.

There has been a rapid and significant improvement in the standards attained by students by the end of Year 11. The percentage of students attaining five or more GCSE A\* to C grades has increased from being significantly below average in 2006 to being significantly above average in 2008. This rise in standards is due to a significant improvement in the progress made by students in Years 10 and 11. The achievement of students from Year 7 through to Year 11 is now good. The progress of all students from the wide range of minority ethnic groups represented within the school is similar. The progress made by boys and girls is similar although more able students of both genders make less progress than 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