

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6855  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr M Taylor  
Headteacher  
Eskdale School  
Stainsacre Lane  
Whitby  
North Yorkshire  
YO22 4HS

Dear Mr Taylor

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 27 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, subject leaders, learning and inclusion managers and a group of pupils. The inspector observed three part-lessons, a reading intervention session and scrutinised relevant documentation.

The headteacher and other staff value the contribution of the secondary national strategy to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. They appreciate the training and support from local authority consultants which they supplement with support from other schools. The headteacher considers that over the last few years, the secondary national strategy helped to make significant changes in the way teachers teach and students learn. Teachers now plan lessons with clear objectives and a more consistent and detailed lesson structure. The programmes that have had most impact are assessment for learning, and intervention to tackle underachievement. The school is finding that the flexibility and structure of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is helpful. It enables the school to link the teaching and assessment practice

from the secondary national strategy to the personal and social learning and thinking skills of the new curriculum. Teachers believe that this has started to create a more coherent approach to achievement.

The lessons observed demonstrated good teaching and effective assessment for learning. This supports the view that the national strategy is having a strong influence on the quality of teaching and learning. The science lesson was outstanding because the pace and challenge of the activities led to excellent investigative work in which students articulated and compared their provisional theories. In mathematics, practical activities were well designed which enabled students to work independently and stimulated their thinking. In English, the teacher gave good direction and encouragement for students whose weaknesses she knew and understood and they responded with confidence in speaking and reading out loud.

Students were very positive about the good use of lesson objectives, practical work, group work, and the use of key words. They value the role of personal learning and thinking skills because it helps them focus on how to accomplish tasks. Teachers regularly explain the criteria for success; students know their levels, and know what they need to do next.

Lesson observation showed that the literacy programme is well-planned and purposefully delivered. Students enjoyed the reading activities and learning games which were linked well to enable them to make good progress. The school effectively supplements the analysis of progress data with individual interviews with underachieving students to identify those learning activities which help or hinder their learning. Repeat interviews show that these students enjoy learning more as a result of changes made by teachers. This is a small school where all members of staff know all students which supports a personalised approach to learning.

The school's effective implementation of secondary national strategies is reflected in the very good progress students make at Eskdale, especially in science and mathematics, but also in English. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is consistently well above average which represents very good progress from the broadly average level of attainment on entry. Teacher assessment shows attainment in almost all other subjects is also much higher than average.

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

Bernard Campbell  
Her Majesty's Inspector