

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 C Gardner  
Headteacher  
Ashton Park School  
Blackmoors Lane  
Bower Ashton  
Bristol  
BS3 2JL

Dear Mr Gardner

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 28 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, senior leaders, other nominated staff and a group of pupils. Parts of three lessons were observed and relevant documentation was scrutinised.

The school's view is that the National Strategy has had a beneficial impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning and in promoting a positive climate for learning. A whole-school focus has been placed on developing assessment for learning and increasing the use of teaching strategies that engage students actively and build their confidence as learners. Senior leaders report that actions taken have improved the overall quality of teaching and learning and resulted in greater consistency in practice across the school. However, they acknowledge that it is difficult to evaluate the separate contribution of individual initiatives in securing school improvement.

On the visit, observations indicated that teachers follow the principles of the three-part lesson consistently and build in opportunities for pupils to assess and reflect upon their own learning as well as that of their peers. Students shared this view. They value lessons most where learning objectives are clearly shared and where practical activities and group work enable them to participate fully in their learning. They appreciate the increasing number of opportunities to assess their work against success criteria and feel more confident about their next steps for learning as a result. The school has a coherent and well-developed approach to supporting vulnerable students which has resulted in a rise in attendance and a fall in the number of fixed-term exclusions over the last three years. Students report that a whole-school review of the behaviour policy has also had a positive impact in improving students' attitudes and reducing disruptions to learning.

The school has valued the guidance from the National Strategies and the range of consultant support it has received. Senior leaders have appreciated particularly, the support and challenge provided by the school improvement partner. Standards have risen overall between 2005 and 2008 and the positive impact of tailored support has raised the achievement of students with learning difficulties and special educational needs. However, the impact of support received is not reflected consistently across the school. Significant variations remain in the performance of boys and girls and also between subjects. Most notably, underachievement persists in English and students' progress by the end of Key Stage 4 has declined over the last three years. Provisional data for 2008 show that the proportion of students gaining five or more good passes in English and mathematics has fallen by 1% to 33% and that progress in English has declined significantly over the last three years when compared with all schools nationally.

The school is very conscious of the need to raise standards and has prioritised actions to raise achievement more rapidly. However, leaders recognise that there is scope to refine its process of evaluation further by using more precise measures to assess the impact of actions taken on students' outcomes.

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

Sara Morrissey  
Her Majesty's Inspector