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Mr Littler  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Littler

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 11 February 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: discussions with the headteacher and other key members of staff, observations of four parts of lessons and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The headteacher reported that the aspect of the National Strategies which is having the greatest positive influence on pupils' achievement is the renewed literacy and numeracy frameworks. This is because they allow greater flexibility in planning, which enables teachers to better meet the needs of the pupils. He states that this flexibility also allows teachers to give greater emphasis to areas of work that have been identified as priorities for improvement, such as problem solving and shape in mathematics, and adapting writing style for different purposes in English. Teachers say they are deriving considerable benefit from the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance and the phonics programme, Letters and Sounds. They explain how they have

successfully adapted Letters and Sounds for Key Stage 2 pupils with additional needs.

To a large extent, the school uses the National Strategies as a bank of useful resources from which they select in order to meet a specific need. A recent example is the guidance they requested from consultants on how to extend the writing skills of higher attaining pupils. While senior leaders value this, they find it difficult to keep abreast of the many different programmes on offer and to understand how they join together as a coherent, long-term school improvement strategy. They are also frustrated when new programmes are introduced before all the required materials are available.

In the part-lessons observed, teachers were using the renewed frameworks effectively to improve pupils' achievement in the areas of English and mathematics that have been identified as needing further development. In a Year 6 class, for example, pupils demonstrated very good discussion skills when working together to solve challenging mathematical problems. A Year 6 intervention group made good progress in using practical investigations to learn how to find the area of a compound shape. In Foundation Stage, children extended their understanding of number in an enjoyable mathematics game. In a Year 5 class, the teacher skilfully linked the lesson objective to pupils' interest in news stories about the recent winter weather. As a result, pupils worked very enthusiastically on developing their skills in persuasive writing.

Overall the school is sustaining above average standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This represents outstanding progress by the pupils who start the school with skills below those typical for their age. The headteacher attributes this success to consistently good and outstanding teaching across the school, with teachers not dependent upon National Strategies' resources but drawing upon them as required. In addition, senior leaders quickly identify the causes of any dip in standards and they immediately take effective action to raise them again. For example, the unvalidated data for Key Stage 2 in 2008 showed a decline in performance by higher attaining pupils in English. However, the school's own data for 2009 shows that this has quickly been reversed. The school has designed a very effective approach to planning additional support for lower attaining pupils and those with a learning difficulty and/or disability. As a result, these groups of pupils are achieving very well and closing the gap with national average standards. National Strategies' programmes have very little influence on this work.

I hope you find this feedback useful.

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

John Rutherford  
Her Majesty's Inspector