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Mr S Clarke
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Clarke

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 18 March 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 students. Parts of four lessons were observed and relevant documentation was scrutinised.

The school's view is that the National Strategies has had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning over a sustained period of time. More recently, the use of materials to support students' social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) has enhanced and combined the different aspects of the school's work in a coherent strategy that promotes both students' personal development and their academic progress. This underpins the caring and supportive Catholic ethos that pervades the school. The Strategies manager has led the implementation of selected strands over a number of years as part of a wide range of initiatives to raise achievement and ensure that all students' needs are met. For example, strategies have been embedded to improve literacy skills across the curriculum. However, while senior leaders feel that the Strategies have contributed to developments

across the school, 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 a common format to lesson planning with clearly shared learning objectives and opportunities built in for students to reflect on their learning and to assess their own progress. Activities were varied and teachers' detailed questioning often elicited an enthusiastic response from students working independently or in groups. On occasion, tasks were over-directed by the teacher and did not fully challenge all students. Students appreciate tasks which engage them actively in their learning and value the opportunity to discuss their work. Those interviewed were unanimous in the view that their 'SEAL targets' helped them to focus on the learning skills they need to develop to support them with all their work. They also reported that they enjoyed the chance to talk with teachers about their progress and felt that adults worked hard to ensure that they were well supported and cared for.

Standards attained by students have remained significantly above the national average over the last three years although the proportion of students attaining five grade C and above passes including English and mathematics fell slightly in 2008. However, the progress made by students relative to their starting points in Year 7 has improved over the last three years and is above the national average. Students' achievement in both English and mathematics has been significantly above the national average for the last two years. Students with statements to meet special educational needs have achieved well over the last three years as a result of the highly effective and well established strategies to support vulnerable students and those with additional learning needs. SEAL materials are being used to enhance this successful approach further to ensure that all students, especially the most able, achieve their full potential.

The school has valued the guidance from the National Strategies and the range of consultant support it has received. Good practice is shared routinely through the well established teaching and learning group which includes representatives from all subject areas and the school is sharply focused on raising achievement further by capturing and sharing the aspects of best practice. Senior leaders are not complacent in their aim to raise standards further. They appreciate the support and challenge provided by the school improvement partner in evaluating the impact of actions on tackling priorities for improvement. Informed by the outcomes of 'learning conversations' with groups of students, senior leaders are in a stronger position to reflect on success criteria identified in the school development plan and to establish more precisely the impact of actions taken on students' outcomes.

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

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector