

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



27 February 2009

Mrs McGarry
Headteacher
St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science
College
Whitefields Road
Solihull
West Midlands
B91 3NZ

Dear Mrs McGarry

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 interviews with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, other senior staff, teachers and students. Three part-lessons were observed. Relevant documentation was scrutinised.

The school has a positive relationship with the local authority National Strategies team and the work of consultants is highly valued. Leaders and managers have been able to select those strategies that have dovetailed with their school priorities for improvement. They feel that the Strategies have had a positive impact on improving teaching, the use of assessment to support learning and the school's systems to track students' progress. They also identify the National Strategies' programme for developing students' social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) as having a positive impact on the climate for learning in the school. Although the senior leadership team judges that the Strategies have had a positive impact on students' achievement they are unable to determine the relative impact of different initiatives or

disaggregate the impact of the National Strategies from other school improvement initiatives such as specialist school work.

In the lessons observed teachers had planned activities around learning outcomes for students and the three part lesson structure was clearly in place. The lessons contained engaging activities that actively involved students in their learning although occasionally teachers talked for too long and gave students too much information. Teachers made good use of digital projectors and interactive white boards to enhance the learning of students. The impact of the SEAL programme was evident in the good or outstanding behaviour seen in the lessons observed.

Students enter the school with standards that are well above the national average. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 remain well above average. The percentage of students attaining 5 or more A* to C GCSE passes including English and mathematics has increased at a faster rate than that seen nationally over the past two years. In 2008, the percentage of students attaining this measure was 29 percentage points above the national average. The school feels the National Strategies have been influential in raising attainment against this benchmark. However, there is some difference in the progress made by students of different abilities and between key stages. For example students have made better progress in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3 in recent years. The progress of less able students is also better than those of higher ability. The school recognises the need to increase the percentage of students attaining Level 7 at the end of Year 9 and A* and A GCSE grades at the end of Year 11. They feel that the National Strategies have not been so influential in raising attainment at this level. The small number of students from minority ethnic groups make similar progress to their peers.

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

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector