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Mr C Barker
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Barker

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 31 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, the inclusion managers, teachers and a group of pupils. I observed three part lessons and scrutinised relevant documentation.

The school is hard federated with Bennett's Well Primary School and both schools will amalgamate onto this site in 2010 when Bennett's Well will close.

Senior staff agree that it is difficult to distinguish the impact of the National Strategies from the impact of home grown and other published materials. Previous instability in staffing, for example, and the lack of consistent leadership in mathematics has affected the continuity of learning. The school is confident that it is their policy of selecting different strategies to meet the needs of pupils which has had the most impact on improving standards and achievement over time. Senior leaders could cite which National Strategies' initiatives have had an impact and which ones have not. They consider that

initiatives which have had the most impact on reading and writing standards in the last two years are not from the National Strategies. Pupils are taught in sets for English, mathematics and science for at least two days a week and school data shows that this is contributing to rising standards. The school has currently adopted the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) initiative across the whole school and this has had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and self-esteem. Attendance and especially punctuality, which were areas for development from the last inspection, have improved dramatically due to a home grown initiative. Vulnerable pupils and families are identified and learning mentors and child and family support workers are deployed to work closely with them. A governors' attendance panel has been set up to monitor attendance and this is leading to sustainable improvements in punctuality.

The school is in the second year of the Assessing Pupils Progress pilot managed by the local authority. Senior leaders say that this has been very time consuming for staff and senior leaders whose time is taken up with administration when they could be working on school-based initiatives. They also say that the school had little choice in adopting this initiative and it is contradictory to the pupil tracking systems already in place within the school.

The headteacher is confident that elements of assessment for learning and talk for learning; coupled with the new freedom of the revised frameworks from the National Strategies has improved teaching and learning. Teachers stated that they are now 'teaching children and not the Strategies'.

In the lessons seen pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and very keen to contribute and engage with the teacher and each other. Opportunities for pupils to talk together and discuss their learning were very productive. There were many opportunities for pupils to use thinking skills to problem solve using their previous knowledge and this was a strong feature of the mathematics lessons seen. There are common strategies used across the school which tell pupils what they will learn and what their teachers' expectations are (WALT and WILF). Teachers use other adults in the classroom and classroom walls to display visual prompts that are effective in supporting learning. The curriculum has been revised and is now skills based with strong links between subject areas and many enrichment activities. This is an improvement since the last inspection in June 2008. Pupils' behaviour was good and pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour are well managed and have suitable strategies to manage their own behaviour to limit disruption to learning.

There has been a slow and steady improvement in reading and mathematics standards in Key Stage 1 from well below to in line with national averages in 2007. Standards in writing however, have been on a steady decline since 2006 and are below average. Standards and achievement in English across Key Stage 2 have improved gradually and reached the national average in 2007. Contextual value added data for 2007 shows that pupils made good progress. However, progress and standards in mathematics have not

improved at the same rate. In Key Stage 2 progress in mathematics has remained stubbornly satisfactory for some years. The school is aware of this and has taken measures to stabilise the leadership of mathematics across the school after many years of instability. Initiatives put in place to improve pupil's mental mathematics abilities are having a positive impact on pupils' progress in mathematics in all year groups. Work targeted at improving boys reading on a one-to-one basis is also showing positive results and is narrowing the gap at Key Stage 1.

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

Joy Frost
Her Majesty's Inspector