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Mrs I H Nierzwicka
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nierzwicka

Ofsted subject survey: identifying good practice in promoting equalities

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 February 2009 to look at work in promoting equality.

The visit provided valuable information that will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included discussions with key members of staff, students, parents, carers, key partners and the observation of parts of four lessons.

The quality of provision to promote equalities is good. There are some outstanding features.

Features of good practice observed

- The level of involvement of pupils in all aspects of school life is outstanding. The "whole school is a team" approach is well understood by pupils who are able to appreciate and value their differences. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions and to care for each other. As a consequence, although significant numbers of pupils have emotional behavioural and social problems, the school is a calm place to be. Pupils involved in a peer mediation project said they got on better with each other and understood more about how people feel when they are upset.

- Staff and leadership in the school have high expectations of pupils and are committed to providing the very best for them. They will not accept the fact that the children live in a socially disadvantaged area as an excuse for poor achievement. Class teachers have been trained in meeting the needs of different groups of pupils and now take responsibility for identifying and meeting the needs of vulnerable children in their class. External agencies working with the school have been impressed with the progress staff have made in moving from children's needs being met by "specialists" outside the classroom to class teachers taking responsibility for the learning of each pupil.
- Ensuring all pupils make the maximum progress is central to the school ethos. Pupil progress is tracked very thoroughly and analysed by class and vulnerable groups on a regular basis. This monitoring identified that there were no significant differences between the progress of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from Gypsy/Roma families and other pupils in the school. However, gifted and talented children were not making as much progress as they should. This group has therefore been identified as a vulnerable group in the context of this school.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are provided with good support. Teaching assistants are well trained and their work in the classroom is subject to observation and feedback in the same way as teachers. Additional support is carefully structured and monitored to ensure that children needing small group support outside the classroom do not miss the same lesson or any special activities.
- The approach to engaging parents as partners in the school is outstanding. The appointment of an extended school co-coordinator who takes the lead on this work has had a marked impact on improving relationships with parents. The coordinator has been creative and persistent in overcoming parents' anxieties and reluctance to come into the school. Parents now say they are confident in their dealings with the school because staff are very open and approachable. In particular, the school has been successful in engaging parents from Gypsy/Roma backgrounds through activities which celebrate and value their culture.
- The school environment is bright and welcoming. Children are proud of their school and take care of the building and grounds. Through the school council, improvements have been made to play areas and suggestions made for improvements to the dining area. The ground floor is easily accessible for pupils with a disability and includes fully adapted disabled toilets and shower facility. As the school is built on a sloping site, classrooms on the first floor can be accessed externally. The school accepts that this is not ideal but is unable to adapt the building further.

Areas for development

- Review lesson planning procedures to ensure that work in all lessons is clearly differentiated for different groups and any pupil who requires specific support.
- Develop more consistent monitoring and tracking of children's personal, social and emotional development to ensure vulnerable pupils are making the same progress as others.
- Implement strategies to raise the attainment of gifted and talented pupils.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to promote equalities in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

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.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Anita Wade
Her Majesty's Inspector