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Mr G Wadwa
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Dear Mr Wadwa

Ofsted survey inspection programme – good practice in literacy

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 29 and 30 September 2009 to look at work in literacy.

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 institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included discussions with senior leaders and middle managers. I also visited parts of 12 lessons, spoke to students and looked at documents, including school data and students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- There is a whole-school approach to raising achievement in literacy which impacts positively on all students and thus advantages vulnerable students. By getting the big picture right the school ensures that the most vulnerable share in the successes of the school. Literacy is the first priority on the school development plan. Each subject department has a literacy action plan.
- Vulnerable groups do as well as other groups. Students on free school meals make outstanding progress in literacy. In the most recent examinations, 40% of them attained five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, from a very low starting point.
- The school implements its behaviour policy consistently. The number of fixed-term exclusions is very low and there have been no permanent exclusions for three years. This is a direct consequence of the opening of two behaviour centres. Students appreciate the very strict rules and report

an absence of oppressive behaviour in school. The behaviour of students seen during the visit was exemplary and the relationships between different groups of students and with staff were very strong. Attendance for all students, including those on free school meals, is high.

- The school has rigorous monitoring systems. The academic progress of every individual is monitored closely by the effective use of technology. Monitoring shows students on free school meals are evenly distributed across ability groups. Students' learning in every lesson, including their behaviour, attendance and punctuality, is monitored very closely as staff are able to update information on the central system during and after every lesson.
- Parents have access online to achievement data about their children. A traffic light system informs them visually how well their children are doing. Links with parents are good and a range of classes and support from learning mentors are available to them.
- Students know how well they are doing. Marking in books gives them a clear indication of their level, what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. For example, they know that using dependent clauses will make sentences more complex and improve their grade or level.
- Early identification of needs in Year 6 enables appropriate support to be in place at the start of Year 7. Learning mentors are attached to each year group and focus their support on the students who are harder to reach. Teaching assistants stay with the same students to ensure continuity and build up good relationships with vulnerable students.
- For looked after children, the school ensures there is a stable environment in school. All staff who teach them know their backgrounds well and are willing to provide extra support to keep them engaged with their learning. They have the same point of contact throughout their time in school wherever possible. Consistency of support from school is a constant in their lives.
- The staggered day, where year groups start and finish at different times, has a calming influence on the school. Students can also come in early or stay late to complete homework or coursework. A range of before- and after-school activities is available to them throughout the extended day.
- The school makes good use of the wide range of languages spoken by staff to help and support parents and students. Students who are literate in another language are encouraged to take a GCSE wherever possible. New students are paired with a buddy and students with English as an additional language are paired with a buddy who speaks the same language to ensure they access the lessons. Conversely those students who are interpreting and translating develop their speaking and listening skills in two languages.
- In lessons, speaking and listening tasks are for a real purpose. Students move around the classroom to exchange information with each other. Staff have been trained well in the development of accelerated learning.

- All teachers set literacy targets in lessons, for example, note-taking skills in geography, learning of key words in mathematics, presentation skills in science, scan reading in sociology and synonyms of words in information and communication technology.
- In art, students evaluate each other's work as well as their own. Students are comfortable feeding back to the whole class. Students mark each other's work against the set writing targets. In physical education, older students develop their speaking and listening skills by teaching younger students, while their peers evaluate them.
- Students benefit from a wide-ranging curriculum and do not miss out on any subjects as a result of receiving additional literacy support.

Areas for development

- Ensure that all staff are aware of the multiple meanings of key words used in lessons for students learning English as an additional language.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop literacy in your school

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

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector