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Sir P Singh  
Headteacher  
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Dear Sir Singh

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 1 and 2 October 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 included discussions with senior leaders and middle managers. I also visited parts of nine lessons, spoke to students and looked at documents including school data and students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The ethos of the school is crucial to the success of vulnerable students in literacy. Senior leaders have ensured a consistent approach to learning throughout the school. There are high expectations for all, demonstrated in the commitment of staff, including senior leaders. There is mutual respect between the staff, parents and students.
- In the most recent examinations, over half of the students on free school meals achieved a good GCSE grade in English language from a low starting point. Nearly two thirds achieved this in English literature.
- The school implements its behaviour policy consistently. Exclusion rates are very low. There has been a dramatic fall in the number of call-outs for low level disruption since the introduction of an inclusion centre. Students say they benefit from learning in an environment that is stable and safe. They enjoy coming to school. Attendance, including that for the most vulnerable students, is above the national average.

- The school knows its students and their starting points well. Students spoken to during the visit know their level in English and what to do to reach the next stage. Most of the students on free school meals have additional needs, for example special educational needs and/or disabilities or English as an additional language. Programmes are well designed to meet individual needs and are flexible. Extra curricular activities, and study support are provided, but there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. Drop-in sessions after school in English help students focus on how to reach their target grade in GCSE.
- The school focuses on the students' overall experience by maintaining a broad curriculum for all while enabling vulnerable students to receive additional literacy support. There are five alternative curriculum pathways for students to follow.
- Learning is enjoyable and fun, according to students. They respond well to speaking and listening activities that involve collaboration through group work where everyone can contribute. Students appreciate the importance of this for other subjects, particularly where they are expected to make presentations. Raised achievement in literacy has enhanced students' speaking and listening skills in drama, essay writing in history and answering techniques in information and communication technology.
- Literacy has a strong focus in other subjects. For example, key words in science are displayed in the classroom and referred to by teachers. Latin is offered in each year group to the most able. This gives them access to more challenging academic English vocabulary which originates from the language.
- A whole day is devoted to literacy where students are encouraged to 'drop everything and read.' Staff share their favourite novels with students. Other languages have a high profile in the school. Bilingualism is celebrated and it is the school's policy that all students should study languages at Key Stage 4 wherever possible.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very strong. Students acknowledge that staff are willing to go the extra mile and teachers, in turn, have high expectations of students.
- Tutor time, including the ten-minute registration after lunch, is used well to practise literacy skills through programmed activities; no time is wasted in the school day.
- The very small number of looked after children have their needs met very well. Study support is used well for looked after children where there is a focus on developing literacy and independent learning. For the most vulnerable students, school is the only place of stability in their lives.
- There are close relationships with the parents and carers of vulnerable students through review meetings and target-setting meetings. Parents have the opportunity to study English GCSE at the school. All have achieved A\* to C grades. There are also literacy classes for parents.
- Transition links with primary schools are very good. All students in Year 7 are supported when they first join the school. A summer school for those

Year 6 leavers, whose attainment in English is below the expected level of for their age, ensures that they have the opportunity to catch up. There is a strong focus on speaking and listening and collaboration during this event.

- The school makes use of its skilled literacy teachers to train staff in other subjects through coaching and peer observation. The best examples of teaching literacy are shared with other departments. Literacy has a high profile in staff training and there is a literacy handbook and bulletin for all staff.

#### Areas for development

- Ensure that the proportion of students on free school meals who go on to reach the very highest GCSE grades is as high in English language as in English literature.
- Extend access to the library for the most vulnerable students.

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