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Mr C Dunne
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dunne

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 12 and 13 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 made included discussions with senior leaders and middle managers. I also visited parts of three 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 at Langdon Park where high expectations by staff do not accept that deprivation will lead to low attainment. The ethos of the school is that 'success breeds success'.
- The most vulnerable students in Year 7 are taught for most of the week by the same teacher who has a primary background. This ensures that these students experience a smooth transition from primary to secondary school and that their work is appropriate to their literacy needs.
- Close partnerships with local primary schools ensure all relevant information on students' prior attainment and current needs is collected and passed on to teachers. Primary pupils experience a range of activities provided by the school before they join at the start of Year 7.
- Students working below the expected level of attainment for their age in English in Year 7 receive a structured synthetic phonics programme in

smaller classes which are well-staffed. This enables them to make good progress in their learning. Students receive additional curriculum time for literacy.

- A high proportion of Bangladeshi students on free school meals who join the school having attained a level of attainment in English below the national average go on to reach the expected level for their age by the end of Key Stage 4. The exclusion rate for these students is very low and their level of attendance is high.
- The school knows its students well. Each student has individual targets so they know how well they are doing and their expected grade or level. Students find progress review days very helpful. Self- and peer-assessment is used effectively to help students review their learning.
- Students confirmed that the school works closely with parents to raise their aspirations and those of their parents. Members of the senior management team telephone many parents personally. Consequently, the school has achieved very high attendance levels at parents' evenings. Parents can attend free classes in information and communication technology provided by the school.
- The local authority funds the school generously which ensures no student goes without the necessary equipment at home. A free breakfast club provides students with an opportunity to complete coursework and homework and enjoy something to eat before the start of the school day.
- Trained student mentors act as role-models for students, as do former students who return to the school to support learners.
- Students know their teachers want them to do really well. Most of the students spoken to regard English as one of their favourite subjects. Students respond well in English and other subjects to practical activities linked to real tasks, role-plays, and the opportunity for discussions in pairs or small groups.
- Students appreciate the additional activities offered including residential courses, workshops and theatre trips, which bring learning to life. Accommodation and access to online learning materials before, during and at the end of the school day is always available.
- Nearly all students are entered for GCSE English literature. Examination results for all pupils including the most vulnerable are improving at a faster rate than nationally. Students in Year 10 can take options in support and/or life skills to address emotional needs as well as academic needs.
- There is a cross-curricular approach to literacy which is embraced by other subjects including mathematics and science.
- There are very good partnerships with external agencies for looked after children. Information is shared well to ensure that those who need to be are well informed about individuals' needs.

Areas for development

- Continue to engage closely with parents of White British students on free school meals who are at risk of underachieving.
- Ensure that students know consistently how to reach the next level of attainment in their subjects through their written targets.

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