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19 October 2009

Mrs J Yates
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Yates

Ofsted aspect survey – Raising aspirations and achievement: the power of partnership

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 28 and 29 September 2009, to look at your partnership with Stogumber Church of England Primary School.

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: brief visits to classes at Crowcombe School; discussions with pupils and staff in both schools; and interviews with you, the senior leader, three governors and a representative from the local authority. I also observed pupils arriving at Stogumber School at the start of the day in the mini-bus, a 'Wake and Shake' session and two lessons.

Features of good practice observed

- From the outset of the federation, both schools were highly committed to working in partnership to improve the quality of education for all the pupils in these two rural communities. Innovative and good strategic planning by senior leaders and governors has secured a successful, well-established hard federation which you are now leading energetically and with fresh eyes. I note that this was the first federation in Somerset and, over the years, the school has worked closely with the local authority to support other federated schools.
- You, the senior leader and the joint governing body are making a concerted effort to ensure communication with staff, parents and the local communities is open and honest, particularly in relation to the transition

options available to the pupils at the end of Years 4 and 6. This approach is contributing to the developing climate of trust within both communities. It is evident that all involved in the federation want what is best for the pupils in both schools.

- Relationships are harmonious. Pupils play happily together. Older pupils show exceptional levels of care for the younger ones, as I observed during the energetic 'Wake and Shake' session. The pupils welcome the increasing numbers of children they socialise with and value having 'more friends' and 'adults who care for us at both schools'. Such opportunities are making a significant contribution to their good personal development.
- Since the start of the federation in September 2005, Stogumber School has benefited from stable, permanent leadership. This is a significant factor in the improved standards and achievement in evidence at the school.
- Crowcombe School is currently gaining from the specialist expertise of recently appointed staff at Stogumber, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The good teaching of letters and sounds I observed by all the adults in this class was carefully planned to meet the needs of young children. Nevertheless, we agreed that there is not enough joint planning time available for the adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage at both schools to improve the quality of curriculum documentation and record keeping.
- Staff report that joint training and meetings are enhancing their professional development. All speak highly of the federation; they are receptive to guidance and are not complacent. They value the increased opportunities provided for dialogue and the training they have received to improve the pupils' writing skills. A fitting testament to this, was the imaginative use of artefacts to inspire the pupils to write in the excellent English I observed in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils spoken to during the visit were unanimous in their appreciation of the number of joint curriculum and enrichment initiatives between the two schools. They spoke enthusiastically about the wide range of activities on offer on 'Flexible Wednesdays', the impressive link with Gambia, the impressive Forest School and the many trips and residential visits planned to broaden their horizons.
- The recently purchased mini-bus is a valuable resource. Because the school is now able to transport pupils between sites, it has enabled you to implement creative approaches to curriculum organisation. The separate provision for the lower and upper Key Stage 2 pupils at both schools, and the weekly year-group teaching sessions for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are appropriate arrangements. The transport is also enabling pupils to attend the wide range of clubs available on both sites, such as gardening and chess, which they and their parents and carers value greatly. Appropriate checks and training are in place to

ensure the safe care and diligent supervision of the pupils as they travel between sites.

- Although still early days, you have made a promising start in leading the federation into its next phase. You have a clear vision for the future and know the priorities for further improvement to make both schools better. You have thoughtfully reviewed the roles and responsibilities of staff to enable subject leaders to lead developments across the federation. Governors are dedicated; they are determined to ensure the best interests of the pupils at both schools are at the heart of all decision-making. We agreed that it is important that the school's self-evaluation form includes clear evidence of the impact of the federation on improved standards and achievement.

Areas for development

- Ensure the school's self-evaluation form provides sufficient detail of the impact of the federation on improved standards and achievement at both schools.
- Allocate quality time for the staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage to develop curriculum documentation.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop partnerships in support of school improvement.

As I explained previously, 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

Mary Harlow
Her Majesty's Inspector