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16 February 2010

Mrs Taylor
Headteacher
Melbury Primary School
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Dear Mrs Taylor,

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: 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 27 January 2010 to look at your partnership with higher education.

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: scrutiny of documentation; two observations of parts of lessons involving university students; discussions with you, other staff, pupils and governors; and meetings with partners from higher education, the local secondary school and the education improvement partnership.

Features of effective practice

- Establishing a range of partnerships with higher education has helped to shape and enrich the curriculum. Improvements in standards have occurred recently, some of which the school attributes to these partnerships. Additional opportunities are being sought constantly and this has resulted in new partnerships and an expansion of pupils' experiences of higher education.
- The school has a very clear vision for its pupils and raising aspirations is central. The school serves an area of significant social disadvantage and the take-up of higher education places has been extremely low. In order to tackle this, the school works with its partners in higher education very effectively to present university as a potential option for all pupils. As a result, many pupils articulate their intentions to attend university – and some are very specific about the courses they are hoping to follow.

- This school shares its vision very effectively with partners, including the newly opened secondary school. Good communication between the two schools is creating continuity across the primary and secondary phases with the schools working together with the same higher education providers.
- The school ensures that partnership activities meet the needs of pupils and prefers projects that will become regular features of the curriculum. Individual pupils are also targeted for specific projects, in response to their specific needs and interests.
- The school provides a curriculum which is broad, balanced and enriched with exciting visits and visitors. Pupils in Year 1 speak with confidence about recent visitors, and understand that university is somewhere that older people learn. Older pupils have a deeper understanding of what university can offer them. They value the opportunities to visit and work in a university and appreciate how they contribute to their learning and personal development. Extra-curricular activities are also enhanced through the partnerships. Pupils have the chance to attend clubs that would otherwise not be offered such as engineering, cheerleading, Latin, philosophy and debating.
- Partners in higher education derive clear benefits from their relationship with the school. They speak of fulfilment as a reward for the outcomes of their work with pupils in the school. The universities are very committed to making a positive contribution to their local communities and their partnerships with the school helps to achieve this.
- Strong leadership is cited by all partners as a significant factor underpinning the success of the partnerships. Exceptionally well-structured systems are in place throughout the school and partners are impressed by how rapidly the school can assimilate, and contribute to, new ideas and projects.
- School staff have good opportunities for professional development as a result of the partnerships. Liaison with partners is very effective and the opportunities for joint planning and evaluation are greatly valued.
- The governing body is supportive of the partnerships and clear about the value they add to pupils' experiences. Governors have their sights set on the long-term success of their pupils and are aware of the importance of ensuring there is sufficient leadership capacity to sustain partnerships.
- The school is creative in securing the services of role-models from its higher education partners. Former pupils who are either currently attending university or have recently graduated are present in a voluntary capacity prior to training as teachers. The students are openly presented as examples of success and as illustrations of the potential within current pupils. These role-models have so far been exclusively female, and the school recognises the importance of involving male counterparts.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring school improvement plans incorporate strategies for maintaining capacity to sustain partnerships with higher education

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

Chris Moodie
Additional Inspector