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Mr D Pearmain
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pearmain

Ofsted 2009-10 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 27 and 28 January 2010 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: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis students' work; and observation of parts of nine lessons and other support activities.

Features of good practice

- Leaders and managers are strongly committed to literacy, which is a whole-school priority. All subject departments feature literacy on their development plans and every lesson plan is required to contain at least one literacy learning objective. There is a strong emphasis on developing literacy techniques and learning of key words.
- The school has invested heavily in time and money to ensure that all staff are well trained in literacy and that the learning support department is very well resourced.
- Leaders use data very well to monitor the progress of those groups of students most at risk of falling behind the expected level of literacy for their age, and provide early support to those who need it.
- Monitoring of all teaching and learning by senior leaders has a close focus on whether teachers have met their literacy objective.

- Teachers are skilled in leading whole-class discussions that enable most students to participate; smaller group work and pairwork further encourage students' speaking and listening skills.
- Marking at its best is supporting students to improve their literacy skills.
- Registration time is supporting literacy well; many students benefit from paired reading with adults. All older students have their own personal progress coach who meets them as often as required to keep them closely focused on their achievement.
- The learning resource centre is open before and after school and contains books at a range of levels to suit individual needs. The centre is used well by students.
- The foundation curriculum from Year 7 provides students with additional time for English and a supportive environment of fewer teachers and smaller class sizes so that they can catch up to the expected level in literacy as quickly as possible.
- The school offers a wide variety of curriculum pathways, including in the sixth form, to engage learners from a wide range of literacy levels.
- Transition links are excellent. The school works well in partnership with its primary schools to monitor students' progress in literacy from a very early stage. This enables the school to have the appropriate provision and support in place from the beginning of Year 7. Kenton has developed a high-quality teaching pack 'Kensuke's Kingdom' which all Year 6 pupils study from the summer term and on into Year 7 to ease their transition to secondary school. Staff collaborate well on joint training for this work. Teachers from the primary schools also work closely with staff from Kenton to exchange information on students. Primary schools send children for visits to Kenton as early as Year 1 so that they are used to the secondary school environment by the time they join in Year 7.

Areas for development

- Ensure that in providing additional time for literacy in the foundation curriculum, students continue to receive their full entitlement in modern languages at Key Stage 3.
- Ensure that all marking and written feedback to students matches the very high quality of the best in the school.

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

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector