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Mr P Rossborough
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Dear Mr Rossborough

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the impact of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

I am grateful for the hospitality and co-operation of you and your staff during my visit with Linda Killman HMI on 30-31 October to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the SNS with particular reference to English, the visit had a focus on the quality of continuity and progression for students on entry to secondary school with observations in Year 7 mathematics.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of English and Year 7 mathematics lessons.

The overall effectiveness and impact of the SNS in English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is good.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 were above average with an increasing proportion of pupils achieving Level 6 and above.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 have been broadly in line with the national average over time. However, in 2006, GCSE results in English improved significantly and standards are now above average.
- Pupils make good progress by the end of Year 9. In 2005, pupils made satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11. However, GCSE results in 2006 rose significantly and this represents improved progress.
- In the lessons observed on the visit, pupils made generally good progress. They showed interest in their work, behaved well and took responsibility for their learning when given the opportunity.
- The SNS has had a good impact on achievement.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, demonstrated effectively in their lesson planning.
- The best lessons provide work matched successfully to pupils' differing needs. However, some lessons did not contain sufficiently varied materials and teachers directed pupils' learning too much.
- There was a good variety of activities in most lessons and good use of pair and group work with pupils expected to make extended oral responses. However, despite the good use of open questions, some pupils are adept at avoiding giving answers.
- Teachers' marking varies in quality. Most is thorough; comments refer to learning objectives and suggest targets for improvement. However, there is also some marking where comments focus on effort and presentation with targets which are too vague.
- The SNS has had a good impact on teaching and learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- There has been very good use of the strengths and weaknesses identified in reviews to structure the curriculum and schemes of work.
- The department has made good progress in revising schemes of work with a focus on developing pupils' skills.
- Schemes of work are very detailed and give good guidance for lesson planning using the four part structure.
- The SNS has had a good impact on the curriculum.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management in English is good.

- The head of department and other managers undertake detailed analysis of assessment data and thorough evaluation of performance leading to accurate identification of issues for improvement.
- These issues are translated effectively into the department improvement plan with very precise detail of the action to be taken.
- The head of department provides very good vision and direction. However, practice in planning, teaching and marking is not yet consistent across all teachers.
- The SNS has had a good impact on leadership and management.

The quality of transition to secondary school

The quality of transition to secondary school is good.

- There are good links with local primary schools, particularly through the teaching of mathematics to Year 6 pupils. The teaching of mathematics in Year 7 is good and builds successfully on these links.
- Collaboration with primary schools on specific units of work is beginning to address pupils' areas of weakness in mathematics.
- Detailed data and information from the primary schools is used to ensure that teachers plan effectively for pupils' of all ability early in Year 7.
- There are good arrangements for helping pupils to transfer successfully into Year 7, particularly for those with specific social or learning needs.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Assessment policy and practice are good. There are effective systems for tracking pupils' progress and identifying underachievement with a good range of strategies available to provide support for pupils.
- Staff are very well informed about pupils' particular needs and communication with parents is good.
- Additional literacy and numeracy sessions are well taught.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure that department policies on teaching, learning, marking and assessment are implemented consistently by all teachers
- to ensure that teachers are confident in using a range of strategies to involve all pupils fully in responding to questions in class discussion

- to ensure that the best practice in improving continuity in curriculum, learning and assessment from primary school is spread across other subjects.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the SNS in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector