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Dear Dr Begbie

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 and Anne Orton HMI on 1-2 November 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 lessons in English, literacy programmes and Year 7 mathematics.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is satisfactory and improving.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 are consistently high with a significant increase in the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels in 2006.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 are above average, although in 2006 the proportion achieving grades A* or A was broadly in line with the average.
- Pupils' progress by the end of Years 9 and 11 is satisfactory.
- In the lessons observed, pupils made at least satisfactory and often good progress. Pupils behaved well and generally had good attitudes to learning.
- The SNS has had an increasingly positive impact on achievement, especially in the last two years.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory with good features.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and lesson plans are generally well structured. However, plenary sessions were ineffective because teachers did not leave sufficient time for them.
- In the better lessons, pupils experienced a good range of activities and were challenged at appropriate levels, matched to their ability.
- In the satisfactory lessons, pupils were often not given enough opportunity to work in pairs or groups. In some lessons, there was insufficient planning for pupils of differing abilities with work being too hard for some and not challenging enough for others. As a result, some pupils lost concentration.
- Teachers' marking is thorough and their comments are well focused on learning objectives. Teachers provide relevant targets for pupils to improve their work. Pupils benefited from the regular opportunities to assess their own work and that of their peers.
- The SNS has had an increasingly positive impact on teaching and learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- Schemes of work have very detailed lesson plans and supporting materials which give good guidance to teachers. There is a good balance of topics based on suitable texts.
- The English department has introduced a good range of additional activities to enrich the curriculum and assist in improving pupils' achievement.
- 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 has a clear vision for further improvement.
- Analysis and evaluation of performance are thorough and identify accurately the key areas for development. Good action plans are in place with clear targets and success criteria.
- Key aspects of the SNS have been successfully introduced with relevant training provided for teachers.

The quality of transition to secondary school

The quality of transition to secondary school is satisfactory with good features.

- There is regular liaison with staff in primary schools to gather personal and academic information on pupils but this is not yet used sufficiently to improve teachers' planning for Year 7 classes.
- There is good use of work started in the primary school in English to set pupils' targets for improvement early in Year 7.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory with good features.

- The needs of all pupils are not met effectively in teachers' planning for some classes where there is a wide range of ability.
- Provision for pupils who receive additional support in literacy is good with very effective leadership and teaching leading to good levels of improvement.
- There are good arrangements to support pupils with specific needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure that plenary sessions are effective in enabling teachers to assess pupils' learning and progress
- to ensure that teachers plan work carefully to match pupils' level of ability so that all can make appropriate progress
- to improve the continuity of curriculum, learning and assessment between primary and secondary school.

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