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Dear Mrs Seymour

Ofsted survey inspection programme 2006/07- physical education

Survey on the impact of the Physical Education School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy on improving the standards of swimming in schools

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 02 March to look at work in swimming.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of the PESSCL strategy in improving the standards and quality of provision in swimming.

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 key staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of a lesson and swimming facilities.

The overall effectiveness of swimming provision was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in swimming are satisfactory.

- Standards in Year 6 are well below the national average. A little over half of pupils meet the recommended National Curriculum requirement to swim 25 metres or more. This is similar to the standard achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in July 2006.
- There is no difference between the standards of boys and girls but the majority of pupils from black minority ethnic backgrounds fail to achieve the National Curriculum expectation.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress in swimming. The entry profile shows that few pupils are able to swim before they commence lessons in school. Periods when the pool has been closed and previous poor organisation of lessons has slowed the progress made. The performance of the present Year 4/5 class shows standards to be improving quickly.
- Pupils say they enjoy swimming. They work hard in lessons, behave well and show a commitment to improving their stroke technique. They are not clear what they need to do to achieve the next level in their work.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching demonstrates many good features. The pupil teacher ratio is excellent in both the curriculum and the 'Top-Up' lessons. The swimming instructors, class teachers and their assistants work well together to structure work so that it matches the needs of individuals and small groups. There is usually a good balance between observational, analytical and performance skills. Emphasis is placed on providing a variety of related challenges so that pupils remain on task.
- The 'Top-Up' lesson was well planned and particularly sensitive to the needs of a small group of weak swimmers that required very small but progressive steps in learning. There is a good supply of resources and buoyancy aids to assist their efforts.
- Objectives describe what the children will 'do' rather than the learning to be achieved. Sometimes teachers provide too much information all at once, which makes it difficult to know and remember the precise purpose of each practice that follows.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The time allocated to swimming within the physical education curriculum, (40 hours in Key Stage 2), is well in excess of that offered by most schools. The one-hour spent in the pool during normal curriculum sessions ensures good progress and continuity in learning. Similarly, the 'Top-UP' lessons have been planned to offer the small number of pupils involved all the necessary time they need to achieve the national curriculum recommendation.

- Assessment procedures are in place to monitor pupils' progress. They are precise and manageable. The information gathered is used to set future targets and structure teaching groups. However, learning goals are not always shared with the pupils and they are unclear what is expected of them by the time they transfer to secondary school.
- There are no opportunities for pupils to take part in extra curricular competitions or festivals. They would welcome the opportunity for intra and inter-school competitions.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management in school is satisfactory.

- Health and safety procedures are in place and day-to-day routines run smoothly. There is good provision through the 'Top-Up' programme for pupils in Year 6 unable to swim.
- Self-evaluation at local authority and school level has not, until very recently, addressed weaknesses in class management and organisation that resulted in pupils having to wait on the poolside for long periods of time. There has been insufficient focus on raising standards.
- Previous leadership and management resulted in inadequate planning and poor delivery of the National Curriculum for physical education through swimming. Recent changes made by the local authority have ensured satisfactory provision. However, the school is not aware of its role as set out in the Swimming Charter.
- The school has not taken up any professional development opportunities in swimming within the PESSCL programme and data provided by the local authority has not been used to analyse progress or reward achievement.

Subject issue – the impact of the PESSCL 'Top-Up' programme

- The PESSCL 'Top-Up' programme has made a significant impact on standards. It is not possible to identify the progress achieved on the form provided to collect data nationally. The quality of planning and of teaching and learning in lessons is very good. The pupils themselves say how much they have enjoyed the extra lessons and they talk enthusiastically about their achievements.
- Despite difficult local circumstances, beyond the immediate control of the Partnership Manager, an efficient and cost effective programme has been put in place. The programme has many very good features. These include, a careful audit to identify those pupils in most need of support, a teacher appointed to cover all the 'Top-Up' groups thus ensuring consistency in delivery, flexibility to fit the programme within the transport arrangements adopted for curriculum swimming by each school and ensuring that each pupil can continue attending until they achieve the National Curriculum expectation.
- Lack of pool availability and local authority data on standards of swimming in Year 6 made it more difficult to plan and deliver the programme.

- The improvement in standards has been carefully recorded and there is a detailed report on the progress made by each child. Parents and the school are regularly updated on the progress made. Arrangements have been made for external monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning of 'Top-Up' lessons.

Inclusion

- Provision ensures that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities are included in lessons and that they are offered a programme suitably matched to their needs. The narrow pool makes it more difficult to challenge the most able group to swim longer distances for sustained periods of time. Teaching assistants and other adults are employed effectively to support the swimming instructors.
- The school makes no specific provision for gifted and talented pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to increase the proportion of pupils reaching National Curriculum expectations in swimming by targeting provision towards those pupils in most need
- sharing with pupils what they need to do to achieve each level in the LA scheme and the National Curriculum expectation by the end of Year 6.
- agreeing with the LA responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in lessons
- ensuring swimming lessons contribute to delivery of all four strands in the National Curriculum programme of study for physical education
- further improving pupils' self-esteem by ensuring they receive their certificates of achievement.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop swimming 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

I Howard Todd
Additional Inspector