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Mr Alex Wills
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Dear Mr Wills

Ofsted survey programme: evaluation of Reforming and Developing the Workforce

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit to Ferndown Upper School on 30 November and 01 December 2006, to evaluate the impact of Reforming and Developing the Workforce. Thank you also for the work you did in advance of the visit. You organised the materials that I needed helpfully and clearly and arranged for me to meet with staff and pupils very efficiently.

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 documentation, and three lesson observations, including analysis of pupils' work.

The overall effectiveness of reforming and developing the workforce in your school was judged to be good.

Impact on standards and the outcomes of Every Child Matters

The impact of the strategy has been good, helping to raise achievement from below average in 2004 to average in 2005 and 2006 at the end of Key Stage 4. Your contextual value added (CVA) score has risen steadily over the last three years.

- Standards are average when pupils join your school at the beginning of Year 9 and slightly above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Results in

the Key Stage 3 tests in 2006 are slightly higher than those in 2005. This is, in part, due to the good level of support pupils and teachers receive from the teaching assistants. Results in mathematics and science are higher than in English.

- Pupils feel safe in the school and value the support and help they receive from their teachers and members of the wider workforce.
- The strong and positive relationships between teachers, the wider workforce and the pupils contribute to their emotional well-being. Teachers are reinforcing this by using some of the time that has been saved from routine administrative tasks to increase the amount of time that they can devote to the pastoral support of pupils. The House Office staff have a valuable role. Because they are not involved in teaching, they are available for pupils and parents from 8am to the end of the school day. They can provide a first line of support for pupils when teachers and teaching assistants are fully occupied and their efforts have already led to improved attendance.
- Pupils' attitudes to school are positive. They enjoy school, especially the practical lessons and the timetabled and after-school PE activities, which help to keep them healthy. The wider workforce has a significant role in organising and resourcing much of this provision.
- The inputs of teaching assistants with particular talents are enhancing the pupils' experience in ICT, technology and science. This increases pupils' enjoyment of learning as well as raising standards.

Impact on the quality of teaching and learning

The impact of the strategy on the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The wide range of tasks undertaken by teachers during PPA time is contributing to improvements in teaching and learning. For example, the opportunity for teachers to have guaranteed preparation time is strengthening their planning and assessment practice. Lessons include a wider range of teaching and learning strategies and better resources as a result. Pupils report that their lessons are interesting and enjoyable.
- Increased attention to differentiation ensures that pupils' individual needs are being met more effectively. This has contributed to the rise in results in 2006.
- TAs are enabling pupils who might otherwise fail in lessons to play a full part because they are modifying the tasks to ensure that these pupils can achieve.

Impact on the quality of curriculum

The impact of the strategy on the quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The teaching assistants have developed additional expertise - in teaching pupils with dyslexia, for example - which has contributed to the curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs.

- The school recognises some of the expertise of the wider workforce and is using it to extend the range of extra-curricular activities. Activities such as sailing and the AS level computing course add to students' enjoyment of school and to their achievement.

Leadership and management of reforming and developing the workforce

Leadership and management of the strategy are good; some aspects are outstanding.

- Senior leaders have a good understanding of and commitment to the principles of workforce reform and development. They understood from an early stage how it could be used to raise standards and have planned changes with this aim always at the forefront.
- The school has made good progress in implementing all phases of the workload agreement.
- There are good arrangements to ensure that middle managers have dedicated time to fulfil their leadership and management responsibilities. The school rightly emphasises the use of this time for monitoring teaching and learning and the increased analysis of pupil performance data.
- The data manager has made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in the school.
- The new post of personnel manager has been a significant success. Part of the Senior Leadership Team, he has won an award as Unison Manager of the Year. He has ensured that the wider workforce feels a full and equal part of the staff of the school through, for example, membership of the Staff Association. They benefit from the same opportunities for professional development and their skills are developed and utilised for the benefit of the pupils.

Impact on training and managing a reformed workforce

- The school has successfully developed a number of inclusive systems: for example, the performance management and continuous professional development of all staff. Teaching assistants feel valued and some are involved in additional training, which could lead eventually to qualified teacher status. The school is actively supporting this.

Impact on inclusion

The impact of the strategy on provision for inclusion is good.

- Pupils' progress is tracked rigorously and booster groups support targeted pupils very effectively. The data manager makes a significant contribution to this.
- Good consideration is given to the deployment of teaching assistants to support vulnerable children, especially those with physical disabilities.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- consider the full range of talents that the wider workforce offers. Some have technical, sporting or artistic skills, for example, that could be further developed to enhance the curriculum
- review the provision of support for lower attaining pupils, especially boys. This is the group of pupils who are at the most risk of underachieving, according to CVA data. At present the support is too fragmented and needs to become more coherent in order to address all their problems and needs, so increasing their motivation and involvement in school.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to reform and develop the school workforce.

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

Paul Cosway
Additional Inspector