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15 April 2009

Mr Hewitson
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Dear Mr Hewitson

Ofsted survey programme visit - National Strategies survey 2008-09

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 March 2009 to look at the impact of the National Strategies on raising standards and narrowing the attainment gap.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit focused on the work of the National Strategies in improving outcomes for children and young people. The visit focused particularly on the school's view of the impact of the National Strategies and how this is evaluated.

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 schools 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 outcomes of the visit included: interviews with staff, discussion with pupils, observation of three part-lessons and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The school has valued the guidance and support from National Strategies' materials and local authority consultants for four main aspects of school work: Assessment for Learning, Numeracy, Literacy, and within that, developing Communication, Learning and Language (CLL). The amount and type of support from the Strategies has been negotiated and agreed with the Local Authority so that it matches school development work more generally. You feel that the approach of teachers has benefited, that pupils' response has been marked and that improving standards and achievement can be linked to these initiatives. Planning at a senior level and across the school identified raising literacy levels of pupils entering the school as a priority. Teachers have worked with consultants to improve pupils' literacy in the Early Years Foundation stage and are using detailed systems to track pupils' progress. This overview is used to inform intervention and, as a result, teachers report that most pupils have moved from Phase One to Phase

Two and are ready for Phase Three which is an improvement on the progress made by similar pupils in previous years.

Support for developing numeracy has been welcomed by staff: the training was appropriate and helpful, and teachers report that they are more confident in teaching concepts and that pupils sustain and build on their understanding. Consultants have given help perceived as practical, including teaching 'model' lessons and giving precise guidance to teachers arising from lesson observations. Similarly, training and support for developing literacy has raised teachers' expectations of pupils' ability, across the age range, in using more sophisticated vocabulary and understanding complex concepts. More challenging teaching is linked to detailed tracking so that teachers have a more rounded view of their pupils' achievements and about which pupils need individual attention. Teachers feel that using the approaches in Assessment for Learning has resulted in pupils now working with teachers to assess their own work and identify their own targets, and that this has benefits in discussion which help pupils progress more quickly.

Teachers' views were supported by evidence observed on my visit. Lessons demonstrated principles in National Strategies' guidance. Teachers and teaching assistants shared clear intent with pupils, work was engaging and challenging, and pupils responded with interest and involvement. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation stage were encouraged to articulate their morning's experiences and readily responded to the teacher's recap of 'sequencing words'. Pupils spoken with felt that lessons had improved in Year 6. They said that the work was harder but more fun and they enjoyed knowing how well they were improving their work. The recently introduced tracking systems are comprehensive and provide staff with useful information. The school matches identified needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities with specific intervention and support drawn from a wide range. Pupils make satisfactory progress and we discussed how analysis of whole-school patterns indicated in tracking data could enhance this work.

The school has improved attendance since its last inspection so that it is now at the national average. Although the school has taken on board some of the Strategies' guidance for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), I agree with you that the main reason for improvement in attendance has been more systematic communication with parents and pupils about the importance of attending school, and the reduction in the numbers of families who take holidays in term time.

Pupils arrive in the school with low levels of literacy and the overall profile has been below average as they enter Key Stage 1. Average points score at the end of Key Stage 1 remain below average but have improved in each of the last two years. After a dip in standards in 2007, 2008 unvalidated data indicate that at Key Stage 2, results were the best the school has achieved and are above the national average overall and for all core subjects. Contextual Value Added scores from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 are above average and indicate good progress made in Key Stage 2. These data, together with the perceptions of staff and pupils, the pace of work in lessons and your current assessments of pupils' progress support your view that the impact of these particular strategies to improve learning is making a

difference. We discussed the benefits of making a more formal evaluation of that impact.

I hope you find this feedback useful.

As I explained in my previous letter, 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

Linden Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector