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Dame Maureen Brennan  
Headteacher  
Barr Beacon Language College  
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Dear Dame Maureen

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: the impact that links between parents/carers and schools have on supporting and encouraging young people's achievement, well-being and personal development

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 January 2010 to look at the impact that links between parents/carers and schools have on supporting and encouraging young people's achievement, well-being and personal development.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the aspect, the visit had a particular focus on how the school's work with parents and carers affects a range of outcomes for students.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with parents, staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and observation of the school at work.

The overall effectiveness of the school's links with parents/carers and its impact on the outcomes for students are good.

The impact of parental involvement on outcomes

The impact of parental involvement on outcomes is good.

- You provide a great deal of useful published information to parents and carers before and during their children's time in the school.

- Parents' evenings have been reorganised as a result of parental input. Parents report that these events are very useful and most parents attend regularly. Other school events are supported similarly well and have seen an increasing number of parents attending over time.
- The ongoing flow of information from school to home is very constructive. Parents are enthusiastic about the positive impact of praise postcards on their children's motivation.
- Parents are quickly informed of any problems with attendance, behaviour, effort or attainment. Parents and students report improvements in behaviour as a result of this engagement. Recent examination results indicate that standards are rising.
- Day-to-day procedures for promoting attendance and punctuality are very good. The school is working hard, with positive results, to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence by highlighting its importance to parents.
- The well-organised school website engages parents effectively in the routines of the school. Clearly this development is not as useful for the few families without ready access to computers.

#### The impact of parental involvement on the quality of provision

The impact of parental involvement on the quality of provision is satisfactory.

- Parental expertise is used rarely as a resource for learning but the school is actively engaged in plans to boost this. Some parents volunteer their services and are engaged in activities such as language exchanges.
- Homework is set consistently across the curriculum and parents and students say completion rates are high. Parents mostly see their role as supporting completion rather than being actively involved in home learning.
- Parents help review the effectiveness of events through questionnaires. Most parents are very happy with recent improvements at Barr Beacon but do not feel actively involved in shaping them. They feel the school would be responsive to their ideas should they give them.
- Parents understand what their children are learning through regular sharing of information and most try to support this learning. Improvements in examination results demonstrate that the school's strategies are increasingly effective.
- Transition processes are effective and allow the school to gather good information before students start school.

#### The impact of the parental involvement on inclusion

The impact of the parental involvement on inclusion is good.

- This is an inclusive school. The way in which parents and carers are engaged makes it more so. The school cares passionately about its students and supports families-in-need through a multi-agency approach.

This has been particularly successful in supporting students with the potential to become disengaged with education. Some parents reflected that this had resulted in their children gaining qualifications and college places that otherwise would have been lost to them. Parents of students with autistic spectrum disorder were full of praise for the recently established support group they can attend.

The impact of leadership and management on the involvement of parents

The impact of leadership and management on the involvement of parents is good.

- You and your senior staff have a clear ethos of a close engagement in your work with parents. You have an acute awareness of your community and the school's place in it. This has resulted in very good relationships with parents who regard the school as a warm, welcoming place.
- The vital role of parents and carers is mentioned positively many times in the school improvement plan. Work with parents is being driven through the Leading Parental Partnerships Award. However, not all staff, parents or governors are currently aware of this work.
- Governors share your view of the importance of parental involvement. They agree that they could contribute more to the development of parental expertise in the curriculum as they become more established.
- The school is increasingly effective in breaking down any barriers parents perceive towards their engagement. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with the way the school is developing. A parental forum is planned.
- Parents spoken to comment very favourably about the school's communication, including the response time to enquiries. The small number of complaints the school receives are usually resolved amicably.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- auditing and systematically developing the use of parental expertise to enhance provision for students in the school
- ensuring all staff, governors and parents are aware of the work on the Leading Parental Partnership Award and the contribution they could make to it
- developing the planned parental forum to ensure parents feel empowered in shaping the direction of the school.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the impact of the work of parents and carers 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale  
Her Majesty's Inspector