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Mr E Moriarty
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Moriarty

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: assessing pupils' progress (APP)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 2 November 2010 to evaluate the impact of the APP initiative.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: scrutiny of documentation; observations of teaching and learning; and discussions with senior leaders, other staff, pupils and a representative from the local authority.

The overall use of assessment to support learning is good.

Impact on pupils' achievement and attainment

- The use of APP has focused assessment and monitoring more precisely and diminished underachievement in English at Key Stage 3.
- Through APP, teachers have developed sharper analysis of areas of weakness and more specific targeting of intervention. These skills have contributed to the first cohort of pupils, with whom APP was used, making better progress and attaining more highly in English between Key Stages 2 and 4 than did previous cohorts.

Impact on the quality of pupils' learning and progress

- By using APP for all pupils in Key Stage 3, English teachers have grown in confidence and accuracy in judging levels, and have rightly set their sights on further refining their judgements. Their increased understanding of progression has helped them to plan and assess pupils' progress more effectively.

- The use of APP in English has helped teachers and support staff to tailor provision to enhance the learning of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and to register their small steps of progress.
- In mathematics, APP has been introduced more recently and is used with a small number of pupils in each Year 9 class. By increasing teachers' awareness of progression, it has enabled them to structure pupils' learning more effectively, although understanding of the methods used is still developing.

Impact on the quality of teaching and the use of assessment to support learning

- Through APP, teachers' understanding of what constitutes evidence for a level has increased. Staff have been more involved in professional dialogue about progression and moderation. This has had a positive impact on their teaching approaches, for example, in their questioning techniques to elicit and develop understanding in mathematics and English.
- Much lesson planning in English is structured around APP assessment foci and pupils' prior attainment, so learning outcomes are more clearly specified, pupils' different needs are met more closely, and teaching has become more efficient and effective.
- In English lessons, pupils discuss and develop understanding of the progression in APP strands. This helps them to assess their own and each other's attainment, identify what they need to do to reach a higher level and improve their learning. Nevertheless, opportunities are missed to assess quickly how well everyone is doing, for example through the use of mini whiteboards.
- Some influence from APP is evident in other subjects, such as history, where pupils are involved in self- and peer-assessment against criteria related to National Curriculum levels and in setting targets for improvement. Although the school has also developed an opportunity for pupils to reflect on their progress and set targets each term in each subject, they sometimes emphasise effort or attitude to work rather than subject skills.

Impact on the curriculum

- APP has had a substantial positive influence on the English schemes of work which have been rewritten to provide more effective sequencing, a greater emphasis on areas of weakness that have become apparent at moderation meetings, and activities that yield richer evidence of pupils' progress. There has been more emphasis on using and appraising specific assessment activities than on continuous assessment that involves pupils in evaluating their own progress.
- The impact of APP is developing in science and in information and communication technology (ICT) with some teachers trying out new materials. In science, progression is more explicit in the Year 7 scheme of work which is being rewritten. In ICT, the schemes of work and

assessments are being structured around APP strands for Years 7 and 9, but not for Year 8, which is taught through other subjects.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- sharing with other subjects, particularly mathematics, the expertise developed in English in increasing the efficiency and validity of assessing all pupils in the class
- involving pupils in taking more responsibility for their own learning and assessment in each lesson, through self- and peer-assessment that links to setting subject-specific targets for improvement.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop assessment practice in support of school improvement.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Gill Close
Her Majesty's Inspector