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Mrs J McGrath
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McGrath

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 10 December 2008 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 the headteacher, other senior staff and pupils. The inspector observed five part-lessons and scrutinised relevant documentation.

The leaders of this very successful school value the contribution the National Strategies have made in helping them prepare pupils well for their futures. In their drive to sustain strengths and improve areas of relative weakness, they have worked closely with their local authority (LA) to tailor Strategy programmes to match the school's context and priorities. Often these programmes, and the highly valued support provided by consultants, build upon practice that is already present or emerging in the school. This makes it difficult to disaggregate the impact of individual National Strategy interventions from other improvement initiatives implemented by the school. However, the school does evaluate the impact of its school improvement activities and is confident that National Strategy programmes such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), Letters and Sounds, Assessment

for Learning and Early Literacy Support (ELS) have a positive impact. They provide additional ideas and professional development opportunities that enhance practice and support the school in its mission to secure both excellence and enjoyment for its pupils. It judges that two Strategy programmes were ineffective – the Primary Leadership Programme (PLP) and Additional Literacy Support (ALS). PLP was not sufficiently adapted to the school's context to increase the effectiveness of leadership and management. ALS did not significantly accelerate the learning of targeted pupils.

In the lessons observed during the visit, key principles of the Strategy were evident. For example, teachers are well aware that when focusing on improving writing, it is important to remember the interdependence of the four aspects of communication: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The excellent use of ICT, film and visual texts motivated pupils and provided rich contexts for high quality language work. In English and mathematics lessons, there were precise success criteria and pupils were clear about the purpose of the lesson. Teachers make effective use of the resources in the revised frameworks to promote assessment for learning in lessons. For example, paired assessment and self-assessment successfully engage pupils in understanding their progress in learning, and identifying next steps. High quality oral feedback in lessons celebrates success and extends learning. In one mathematics lesson observed, the pace of learning for the highest achieving pupils was too slow because the whole class work did not offer sufficient challenge for this group.

The National Strategy programmes, professional development resources and the support from consultants have helped secure consistently high standards, achievement and attendance at the school. During the period 2005 – 2008, standards at Key Stage 1 and 2 have been significantly higher than the national average. Attendance is well above average, reflecting the impact of SEAL and the pupils' enjoyment of school. The school's use of ELS in Key Stage 1 does secure sustained improvement and the standards achieved by vulnerable groups are above those achieved nationally.

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley
Her Majesty's Inspector