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Mr E Furneaux
Principal
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Dear Mr Furneaux

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 January 2009 to look at work in CPD.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of CPD the visit had a particular focus on how professional development activities impact on raising standards and achievement.

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 judgement about the overall effectiveness of CPD included interviews with senior managers and a number of teaching and non-teaching staff, a meeting with students involved in delivering CPD, scrutiny of relevant documentation and the observation of one lesson coupled with feedback with a senior manager.

The overall effectiveness of CPD was judged to be outstanding.

The strengths identified

- Heathfield is a school where there is an outstanding commitment to the professional development of all staff. Everyone I spoke to during the course of the day, staff, students and governors were enthusiastic about their school and feel valued and respected. As a result staff are keen to work in the school, feel motivated and staff turnover is low because the school places a high importance on their well-being and enjoyment at work. This is

a high achieving school but with no room for complacency and CPD is at the heart of the continuing drive for improvement.

- CPD is closely linked to both whole school and departmental development plans, although all developmental requests from individuals are considered by senior managers and governors. There is an expectation that professional development is a corporate responsibility and all teaching staff and teaching assistants have a resourced plan linked to their training needs and career development. As one member of staff explained, succession planning is part of the school culture and appointments are made in the school, 'not to fill slots but to add to a team'. Another teacher commented, 'the headteacher and his senior managers are good at spotting potential' and actively seek ways of providing staff with greater professional challenge and job satisfaction; for example through secondment to the management team or responsibility for a new initiative.
- Staff have a clear understanding of how to access development opportunities, much of which is offered within the school. They are also encouraged to engage in a range of accredited courses including degrees, where financial support is available, and further professional qualifications such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship.
- The induction process for new staff including Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) is excellent. Most NQTs take up post in the July prior to their first full term in the school, this increases their confidence, enables them to identify with existing staff and become familiar with school systems.
- All staff interviewed expressed tremendous confidence in the senior management team, believing them to be approachable yet challenging. The school's drive for improvement is evidenced through calculated risk taking and the culture of building on success. Staff explained that they are given the space and freedom to run with new ideas and are not afraid to acknowledge when something has not gone according to plan and needs reworking.
- There is clear evidence to show that CPD leads to better practice in teaching and improved standards. Students were able to give direct examples of changes to teaching which had been brought about by their innovative delivery of CPD to staff, on dyslexia and the gifted and talented. Where specific departments had been under performing, relative to the rest of the school, challenge, support and training have brought about rapid rises in outcomes for students.
- The interconnection between school and department improvement planning, performance management processes and CPD is seamless and monitoring and evaluation processes are rigorous. In discussions the staff were very clear about these links and feel the process for setting their performance targets and identifying development needs is exemplary.
- Specialist status, international links and Leading Edge status have greatly enhanced the CPD opportunities that the school is able to provide. Not only has the performing arts status been of benefit within the school but the contribution that staff make to training externally is widely recognised and enhances their own professional standing. The well established links and subsequent visits to schools in Europe and Peru have proved motivational for younger staff and those who have been teaching for some time find these experiences reinvigorate their teaching.

- As part of the South West Collaborative the school has been invited to share its good practice in raising student performance across a group of some thirty schools in the region. The headteacher has also been instrumental in drawing together the local authority raising achievement plan which is currently being implemented across all secondary and middle schools in the county. He is leading the implementation of the plan in 2008/09 where the focus is on monitoring and CPD.
- The school is at the forefront of much innovative practice, including the development of a coaching model, the process for departmental review and sharing good practice throughout the school and the inclusion of students in the delivery of training to staff.
- The management and coordination of CPD are outstanding and monitoring systems are rigorous and consistently used. Both senior managers and governors have a clear understanding of the cost effectiveness and impact of CPD opportunities on improved outcomes and provision.

Areas for improvement have already been identified by the school and include:

- moving target review meetings to the end of the spring term, which would place them half way through the review cycle
- a new format for recording CPD interviews
- all staff who attend external training to complete a school evaluation form.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop CPD 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

Pauline Robins
Her Majesty's Inspector