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Dear Mrs Bills

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during our visit on 13 and 14 October 2010 to look at the leadership of the federation. Please pass on our thanks to the local authority representative, the parents and governors that also gave up their time and made a valuable contribution to the visit.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. 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: interviews with senior leaders and middle leaders, governors, staff, parents, pupils and a local authority representative; and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is outstanding.

Outcomes

- Attainment has been rising in both schools since federation and is now above average. The federation has been highly effective in ensuring that all pupils secure a firm understanding of literacy early in their school life.

By the end of Key Stage 2 a greater proportion of pupils than average gain Level 5 or more in English. Not content with this, the federation recognises the next steps are to increase this proportion even further in all subjects and particularly in writing. The improvements since federation have resulted in achievement that is at least good for the large majority of pupils.

- Pupils enjoy going to the federation schools a great deal and say that this is largely because of their teachers. Extremely positive attitudes to learning and a strong sense of community are well developed across the federation. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils are polite and eager to talk about how the teachers make learning fun and challenging for them.
- The extra opportunities to work across the schools have helped to build confidence, widen friendship groups and eased the transition to secondary school.

Provision

- There are some consistently strong features of teaching across the federation that have resulted in the much improved achievement. For example, teachers' extensive knowledge about individual pupils' needs as a result of clear and accurate assessment of their skills and understanding. Excellent relationships in the classroom are based on mutual respect and result in an extremely cooperative working ethos.
- Highly effective professional development opportunities have enabled teachers to contribute to the very effective curriculum provided. As a result of the federation, Stanton Drew pupils have much greater opportunities for sport and information and communication technology. Pupils particularly commented on the independence that they experience during 'challenge weeks'. These challenge weeks have included producing food, African dance and drumming.

Leadership and management

- You lead the federation extremely well with support from the senior team. A clear direction, and the ability to prioritise well enable the staff to develop teaching and the curriculum very effectively. The federation team demonstrates a dedicated common purpose to providing high-quality learning opportunities for all pupils.
- The governing body contributes well to the strategic direction of the federation and is very effective in its analysis of the schools and their impact on outcomes. It also has a clear idea as to how it will develop its function and impact still further. This includes how it will communicate to parents the impact federation has had so far.
- The local authority was supportive when the schools federated, but had little experience at the time of the federation process. This federation is used as a model of excellence in the authority. You have made a strong contribution to the wider understanding of federation across the authority.

- Leaders have successfully established a high level of trust with parents and carers, high morale among staff and extremely happy pupils across the federation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed include:

- developing further the successful strategies for driving up standards, particularly in writing.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector