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Dear Mr Elliott-Kemp

SCHOOLS FACING CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES: VISIT TO QUINTIN KYNASTON SCHOOL

Thank you for your hospitality during my visit to your school with my colleague, Michael Pipes, Additional Inspector, on 10 and 11 December 2001. This letter is to confirm the findings, which are recorded below.

This inspection visit was arranged in connection with the Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances initiative. The focus was the pupils' attainment and the factors affecting it; the effectiveness and impact of the actions which you are already taking to raise the pupils' attainment; and the impact of external support which the school is receiving.

We inspected 23 part-lessons in both key stages [3 and 4], attended an assembly and two registration periods, read a range of documents provided by you, talked to you and senior staff, teachers, pupils and others, looked at the pupils' work, and walked around the school during some break-times.

Quintin Kynaston is an 11-18 school with 1090 pupils on roll, including 101 in the sixth form. The roll has risen steadily from a trough of 733 in 1998, and looks set to continue rising for some years as cohorts of around 100 pupils in Years 10 and 11 are projected to be replaced by numbers closer to the admission limit for each year which is set at 210. In common with other mixed schools in the area, there is a gender imbalance of about three to two in favour of boys. Sixty per cent of the pupils speak English as an additional language, with 25 per cent of pupils at stages 1-3, and a total of about 15 pupils at stage 1. The largest ethnic minority groups are Bengali/Bangladeshi (15 per cent), Arabic (15 per cent), African (10 per cent) and Albanian (7 per cent). There are many other smaller groups, and there are altogether 55 languages spoken by the pupils. Pupils come from a wide area of London, involving over 60 primary schools, although in recent years a significant number have come from four local Westminster primary schools. There is high student mobility with 30 per cent of students on roll having joined the school since Year 7. Typically, this group of pupils have lower standards of attainment.

The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals has decreased steadily in the last four years and now stands at 40 per cent, which is still more than double the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (16 per cent), and the proportion with Statements of Special Educational Need (2.0 per cent), are both in line with the national average.

Attendance has improved from 88.7 per cent in 1998, to 90.3 per cent in 2001, and is reported by the school to be 93 per cent so far this academic year. In the same period, unauthorised absence has decreased from 4.2 per cent to 2.8 per cent. Permanent exclusions have reduced over recent years. There were four in 2000/01, with a further one overturned on appeal. Fixed-term exclusions decreased steadily over the past few years but increased last year, partly as a function of the decrease in permanent exclusions, but also as a result of a drive to improve the behaviour of a group of pupils who no longer took other sanctions seriously.

Attainment on entry to the school over the last five years has steadily improved. In 1996, 21 per cent arrived with Level 4 or above in the English Key Stage 2 tests. By 2001 that figure was 60 per cent. However, about two in three pupils have reading ages below chronological age. Standards in mathematics and science are higher, and overall attainment on entry is in line with the national average in those subjects, but below average in English. At Key Stage 3, the results in all three subjects have improved markedly this year. In the past two years, the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 or above in all three core subjects has been well below the national average. In 2001, it is below average in English, just below in science, and in line in mathematics. Compared to schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, results are above average in English, and very high in both science and mathematics. The school's measure of improvement in grades from the tests at Key Stage 2 to the ones at the end of Key stage 3 show that mathematics has been particularly successful with over 80 per cent of the pupils improving by one or more grades, compared to 77 per cent in English and 64 per cent in science. There has been no major difference in the relative performance compared to national norms of the boys and the girls over the last few years, except in science where the girls are performing better. The trend in mathematics and science over the last five years is above the national trend, and in English it is in line.

In the GCSE examinations in 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A* to C was the highest it has been in recent years at 33 per cent, which is below the national average but is above the average for schools whose pupils attain a similar level in Key Stage 3. The proportion gaining five or more grades A* to G was 80 per cent, similar to the previous year, and below the national average as well as below the average for schools with similar prior attainment. However, a very high proportion of pupils, 98 per cent, achieve at least one grade A* to G. This is above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. In the core subjects, mathematics has improved steadily in recent years, and the proportion of pupils gaining a grade C or better is just below the national average. The other two subjects are less successful. The trend in the core subjects in the last five years is above the national trend. Over this period there has been no significant difference in the performance of the boys and of the girls relative to national norms, although more recently girls have begun moving ahead.

The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was predominantly good. Where the teaching was good, better than average learning usually occurred, but in some cases the capability and concentration of the pupils did not match the persistence and patience of the teacher. The 23 part-lessons observed focused mainly on the permanent teachers but included several who are newly qualified. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and in just over eight tenths of the lessons, the teaching was at least good; it was very good in about one in six and excellent in a Year 10 English lesson. At Key Stage 3, in four fifths of the lessons seen, teaching was at least good. At Key Stage 4, the proportion was slightly higher with approximately five sixths at least good, and with a quarter very good or excellent. Characteristics of the good teaching seen included: good lesson planning; clear objectives shared with the pupils; criteria for improvement explained; targets for improvement agreed and set. These elements were present in the majority of the lessons seen but some of the lesson plans did not include all the desirable aspects. The weaknesses seen in some lessons included insufficient account taken of different levels of need, and weak evaluation of what had, and had not, been learnt. However, the pupils responded well to generally good teacher subject expertise and confidence and, in all the lessons seen, the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils was at least satisfactory and, overall, predominantly good.

There is good guidance for supply teachers, including lesson plans and information about school routines and expectations. The eight newly qualified teachers have a good induction programme and are supported well. There is good emphasis on in-service training and personal professional development. For instance, very good use is being made of information and communication technology (ICT) and the teachers are embracing the possibilities enthusiastically and confidently.

Good assessment strategies are now routine in all subjects. Progress checks, allied where appropriate to individual education plans, form the basis for regular reporting to parents and the consultation days recently introduced. The school uses a sensible variety of testing procedures, usually linked to schemes of work. These are interpreted sensitively and used to motivate, provoke, cajole and, where necessary, dictate to the pupils how to improve.

The school now has a school-based part-time education welfare officer (EWO) who analyses absence patterns, does home visits and chases up persistent absentees. Punctuality is reasonable; a few pupils were observed arriving late in the morning and for lessons. During lessons, however, the school is quiet and there is a good atmosphere.

Around the school during break times the behaviour and attitude of the pupils is less positive. A significant group feel that school is not a place they relate to or enjoy attending. Some pupils are rather boisterous, particularly in the corridors on the way to lessons, but no examples of poor behaviour were seen. In the dining room teachers work hard to maintain good order. Many parts of the school are drab and unwelcoming which contributes to a lack of community feel. Leadership by the Headteacher is very good. It is resolute and focused on raising attainment. His vision for a school where all pupils can attain good results is understood and accepted by the school community. This has resulted in a clear set of priorities for the development of the school that have been put into place consistently and effectively. The main drive has been to raise standards through the improvement of key skills in the core subjects. This has been done in a variety of ways, including increasing staffing to reduce class sizes in those areas, and focusing senior management attention and support on them. This is beginning to have a major impact on standards. Senior management colleagues provide good support to the Headteacher in the daily management of the school and in the maintenance of good order. The team has been appropriately strengthened recently to improve strategic planning. Heads of departments provide good leadership. They have a good measure of delegated authority and use it well, for example in the creative use of pupil grouping introduced in English in Year 10, in curriculum development to make science more relevant, and in the move to whole class interactive teaching in mathematics. The Headteacher and senior staff have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and of individual teachers. Development plans are well focused. There is a good programme of support for temporary staff, and for those who are new to the school. There now a healthy climate of monitoring, review and development in the school.

Staff teaching Year 11 classes are fully committed to ensuring that the pupils attain the highest level possible in the GCSE examinations. Extra lessons are provided in most subject areas after the school day finishes, and there is a holiday revision school at Easter. There are also private study and homework facilities, and the library is open before and after school. Pupils who are underachieving, and who are on the borderline of obtaining a grade C are targeted in a variety of ways, including mentoring, involving parents through a special "achievers" evening, and within individual subject areas.

The school has made a number of key developments that should support a continued rise in standards. There has been a major change in attitude to attainment over the last four years. Previously it was thought that low attainment was a consequence of the background of many of the pupils in the school, but there is now widespread view that the pupils in the school could and should do better. The use of data to track performance and to set targets for attainment is now providing strong support to raising standards. Thirdly, the focus on the core subjects and on key skills is appropriately directed and is backed up by clear, well-resourced plans. These three factors are major contributors to rapidly rising standards. Attendance is now satisfactory, and the community perception of the school, and its support, is a positive influence. The improvement of literacy on entry together with the school's own actions to target those with literacy needs, is well directed and a further key to raising standards. There is a good structure of support for all pupils through the pastoral system, although the increase in the number on roll provides new challenges.

The school receives extra funding from several sources, totalling £835,000 in the current year, of which £635,000 has so far been committed. The funds are being used appropriately and effectively.

Overall the school is making good progress in raising standards of attainment, and is providing a satisfactory standard of education. Further action, which the school should consider:

- while maintaining the drive to raise standards, consider how a greater sense of community can be developed in the school;
- ensure that the quality of lesson planning seen in many areas is spread to all.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Governors and the Chief Education Officer for Westminster.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

C J English
Additional Inspector