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Dear Miss Wilson

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during our visit on 19 to 20 October 2010 to look at work in PSHE education.

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: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 15 lessons, a tutor period and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good with outstanding features.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good with outstanding features.

- Students' personal development is outstanding. They form open and respectful relationships and grow in confidence and maturity during their time at the school. They are sensitive and supportive of each other and willing to discuss feelings and emotions openly.
- Students know what is meant by a healthy, balanced diet and why this is important. They apply this knowledge to the meals they eat in the dining room and the packed lunches they bring to school.
- Students have a strong understanding of why exercise is important in maintaining physical health because health and exercise is a strong component of physical education at the school.

- All students spoken to felt safe in the school and well supported by student services. They know how to stay safe when they are outside school. They have practised saying no and resisting peer-group pressure in drama lessons. Students have a good knowledge of the harmful effects of drugs including alcohol.
- Even younger students have a very good knowledge and understanding of different types of relationships. They have a good understanding of sex and relationships education. For example, they know the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of contraception and the risks involved.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, are prepared well for the next stage of their education by a well-planned programme of careers education and guidance and through valuable work experience.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of financial capability and enterprise skills are less well developed. Sixth-form students in particular identified this as an area where they would welcome more input as they feel they do not have enough knowledge.

Quality of teaching of PSHE education

The quality of teaching of PSHE education is good.

- Lessons were well planned and had clear learning objectives which were shared well with students.
- Most teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and able to create a safe, supportive learning atmosphere with good relationships and behaviour management. Teachers dealt with sensitive questions well and confidently.
- Excellent health and fitness resources, including electronic technology, were used well to measure exercise and support students' understanding of energy balance scales to compare input and output.
- A variety of methods were used to teach PSHE education. However, in weaker lessons, activities were very much teacher directed and group work was not always well organised or structured.
- Assessment takes place through end of unit assessments in Key Stage 3. However, assessment in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is through subjects where appropriate, and progress in PSHE education is not monitored specifically.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the PSHE education curriculum is good with outstanding features.

- The curriculum is broad and permeates many aspects of the school's work from discrete teaching to cross-curriculum coverage. However, at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, because there is no discrete PSHE lesson, the different elements of provision are fragmented and lack coherence.

- The provision to meet the needs of different groups of students is outstanding. Excellent help and support with communication, personal and social skills are provided effectively in the Curriculum Plus Centre and by the alternative curriculum provision which includes accredited courses in PSHE education. The student services team is highly effective in identifying students who need additional support to promote their personal and social skills.
- The Healthy Schools award has had a positive impact on healthy eating and the sports curriculum to support health and exercise.
- A strength of the curriculum is the wide range of external agencies which the school uses to complement its own services. For example, over 40 employers are involved in student workshops on Industry Day.
- The wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities gives students outstanding opportunities to develop, apply and practise their personal and social skills.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

The leadership and management of PSHE education are good.

- Senior leaders and managers have been very successful in establishing a high profile for PSHE education across the school.
- The subject leadership has developed many aspects of the provision and has ensured that the curriculum is up to date and responsive to local circumstances.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the different aspects of the PSHE programme are effective.
- The school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses and the subject development plan contributes to identifying appropriate priorities for PSHE education.
- Staff are well trained and both the PSHE coordinator and the special needs co-coordinator have the PSHE certificate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving provision and assessment at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to bring greater coherence
- ensuring all students study relevant elements of financial capability and enterprise.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop PSHE education in the school.

As I 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

Margaret Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector