

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



7 February 2011

Ms J O'Connor  
Headteacher  
Dowdales School  
Dalton-in-Furness  
Cumbria  
LA15 8AH

Dear Ms O'Connor

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: physical education (PE)**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 January 2011 to look at work in PE.

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 nine lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of PE is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in PE**

Achievement in PE is satisfactory.

- Attainment in GCSE PE is below average and on a declining trend. In the most recent examinations, a significant number of students failed to achieve their expected grade. Internal data suggest that strategies to arrest the decline in standards are beginning to have a positive impact.
- Attainment in core PE is broadly average. Students make good progress in some aspects of their learning. They enjoy PE, are highly motivated and committed and rarely miss lessons. When excused from physical activity, students are actively engaged through officiating or coaching roles. Students dress appropriately, know how to remain safe and show consideration for others when working individually or within a group activity.
- Students apply themselves diligently; they acquire new knowledge and skills occasionally showing creative and original responses to their work. However, their ability to evaluate and improve their own and others'

performance does not match the level of their physical skills and fitness. They lack the depth of understanding to make advanced adjustments and adaptations.

- Students improve their skills through the school's extensive range of extra-curricular activities and some progress to regional and national level. The school's effective links to community clubs, for example in rugby league and table tennis, have helped to raise standards.
- Teachers promote health effectively and students are committed to leading active and healthy lifestyles. Students have the mental determination and fitness levels to sustain activity in a range of contexts. However, they lack the knowledge and understanding of fitness components to enable them to prepare themselves for physical activity.

### **Quality of teaching in PE**

The quality of teaching in PE is good.

- Relationships with students are good, supported by good use of praise and encouragement which help to build students' confidence and commitment to succeed. The pace of learning in most lessons ensures that students remain interested and engaged.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the activities they teach and communicate effectively. They use a wide range of resources to support learning, including some use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Behaviour is consistently good and makes a strong contribution to learning. However, in lessons when the teachers' instructions and dialogue were too prolonged, students' behaviour was passive and they became less interactive in their learning.
- External coaching support is well-focused and used extensively to enhance learning, in curriculum and out-of-school time.
- Teachers plan appropriately to meet students' needs. Learning objectives are clear and take account of prior learning. When teaching was most effective, students were engaged in extended discussions which helped them to understand learning expectations and to progress at their own level. The teacher's ongoing observation and feedback was timely and succinct and made direct reference to learning outcomes. In these lessons, peer-assessment enhanced students' understanding and enabled them to progress more independently; they were encouraged to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Criteria used to inform summative assessment are not applied consistently across the department. There is no evidence to show that teachers take account of the non-performance aspects of the subject, as well as their performance, when making a judgement.

## **Quality of the curriculum in PE**

The quality of the PE curriculum is good.

- Almost all students meet or exceed the target of two hours of high-quality PE in the curriculum each week. A majority access a further one hour of school sport or dance each week, taking advantage of the extensive extra-curricular programme which provides both competitive and participatory opportunities, open to all students. Pathways for students to progress into community sport are clear. Effective partnerships, including with national governing bodies, have resulted in a number of centres of excellence and community clubs being established on the school premises and activities continue through holiday periods. The school has very good facilities, both indoors and out, to support the subject.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum meets statutory requirements. It is a traditional games-heavy programme, although matched well to the local community, students' interests and takes full advantage of its strong club links to enhance provision through specialist coaches. The longer units of work allow for more depth of study; some units are too short to support better progress.
- The school provides a more diverse programme at Key Stage 4, including options such as leadership, golf and swimming, which enable students to progress in their chosen sports.
- Leadership has become an integral part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Students speak very positively about these experiences which have helped them to develop confidence and new skills. They especially enjoy supporting partner primary school competitions and festivals. Approximately 40% of students in Key Stage 4 achieve an accredited leadership award.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is satisfactory.

- Self-evaluation is broadly accurate. The subject and senior leaders are motivated to seek further improvement and are focusing effectively on subject priorities. An action plan is in place, which focuses on improving outcomes for students. However, the strategies to resolve underachievement in examinations, which are beginning to have an impact, have only been implemented recently and are largely as a result of support from the senior leadership team.
- Leadership is informed by current developments. However, it has not been focused sufficiently on improving the quality of teaching and assessment, especially approaches to teaching which challenge students' independence and ensure that they make good or better progress.
- You and senior leaders are fully aware of the subject's value. PE and school sport have a high profile and are viewed as an important part of students' development. Links with outside agencies and the community have significantly enhanced provision.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- raising attainment and learning and progress in GCSE PE by improving students' ability to evaluate and improve their own and others' skills
- formalising assessment procedures, including regular moderation, to establish consistent practice across the department
- modernising approaches to teaching so that students can develop more independence and creativity in their learning.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop PE 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

**Geoff Sheldon**  
**Additional Inspector**