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Mr R Gilpin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gilpin

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 8 and 9 March 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 eight lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of PE is satisfactory.

Achievement in PE

Achievement in PE is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment is average overall with small groups identified as gifted and talented attaining above this, especially in games activities. Students are capable of achieving more than at present. Students make satisfactory progress in acquiring skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject during their time at the school. They make swifter progress in the most successful lessons because teaching gives them direct and precise feedback on how to improve. For example, in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson, boys made good progress in their body positions and control while learning different vaults because they were given clear advice on how to improve. A small number of students attain levels of excellence and have representative honours, mainly in games activities.

- All students who take the BTEC sports introduced two years ago or the BTEC dance course attain a pass. An increasing number either gain or are on track to attain the higher merit or distinction grade. Although relatively few opt to take these courses, currently the school has changed the option choices to encourage greater take-up from September 2011.
- A stronger aspect of the department's work is its development of students' personal and thinking skills. Students are given good opportunities to take different roles in lessons and, consequently, are becoming confident to lead activities with their peers. However, few have opportunities to use these leadership skills outside lessons. Students are becoming increasingly competent at observing, evaluating and improving their own and others' work. Most understand how to develop a healthy lifestyle. However, they are unable to work for sustained periods of time without the encouragement or motivation of staff.
- All students spoken to said that they enjoyed PE lessons although they frequently commented that work was not challenging enough. Most display positive attitudes towards the subject, particularly in Key Stage 3. Behaviour was good overall in the lessons observed and the small number of lapses were dealt with swiftly and effectively to re-engage students in their learning.

Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching in PE is good overall.

- The department has experienced high levels of turbulence in staffing in recent years which has adversely affected the rate of students' progress. The department is now more stable; teaching is good overall, although it is yet to impact fully on improving students' achievements. All teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are purposeful. However, inconsistencies remain across the department in teachers' expectations and in the amount of direct intervention to ensure that all students understand their next steps in learning.
- In the most successful lessons, teaching makes good use of demonstration to set high expectations, uses highly effective open-ended questioning to extend students' thinking skills and the careful observation of their work enables direct and specific feedback on how to improve further.
- In all lessons teaching sets clear learning objectives. The most successful lessons reinforce the objectives throughout with continuous references in feedback and short evaluation sessions to improve the quality of students' performance skills. A good range of teaching methods is used but not all lessons include enough tasks that are well matched to the needs of students with different levels of ability. All staff use praise well to engage and motivate students and good relationships exist between staff and students.
- The use of formal assessment is varied. All students in Key Stage 3 know their National Curriculum level of attainment and target for improvement. Most are starting to understand how to improve their work more clearly, especially in Years 7 and 8, since the introduction of the self-assessment

booklets. As no formal assessment takes place in core Key Stage 4 lessons, students are less secure in understanding their progress or how to improve. All students have increasing opportunities for peer-assessment that they say is helping them to have a better understanding of how to improve their own work.

- Assessment procedures to record students' progress are good in Key Stage 3 and BTEC. Key Stage 3 criteria miss the opportunity to assess students' wider skills such as leadership, coaching or problem-solving abilities and are not analysed thoroughly to give a secure view of progress over time and to inform the department's improvement planning further.

Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the PE curriculum is satisfactory.

- All students access at least two hours of PE in the curriculum each week and additional time is available for dance as part of a performing arts carousel of activities. Students identified as gifted and talented in PE have a programme of additional activities frequently linked to the school sport partnership.
- The curriculum places high emphasis on traditional team games in both Key Stages 3 and 4 so is not giving a breadth of experiences, especially in individual or aesthetic activities. The department is aware of this and has started to introduce other activities, such as team building through outdoor and adventurous activities and fitness units of work. Effective plans are in place to increase links through the performing arts status to extend opportunities in dance and aerobics, especially for older girls to better meet their needs and interests.
- The extra-curricular programme is also dominated by traditional team games. The introduction of activities such as volleyball is starting to attract different students to attend. Students say that staff respond positively to their suggestions for alternative club activities. For example, a gymnastics club was introduced last year following a request from students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is satisfactory and improving rapidly.

- Disrupted subject leadership and turbulence in departmental staffing in recent years have led to some stalling in driving improvements in the subject. However, the acting head of department and stability in staffing are leading to rapid and positive changes. These include reviewing the curriculum and schemes of work to better support teaching and learning, monitoring of students' progress for early interventions and sharing of teaching practices to bring about greater consistency. However, these are yet to be embedded fully and have not yet had time to impact on students' achievements.
- Self-evaluation is accurate based on secure monitoring and evaluation procedures. This is leading to a clear focus and vision for future

improvements with clear plans and strategies in place to support the developments. The acting head of department has good awareness of developments in PE and school sport. The effective links with the school sport partnership and performing arts department are supporting improvements. For example, the school sports coordinator arranges for BTEC sport students to use their leadership skills through organising and running festivals and tournaments for primary pupils, the introduction of golf into the Key Stage 4 curriculum and arranging specialist coaching for girls' football after school.

- The profile of PE is being raised effectively across the school and you give good support to the subject. Displays around the PE area celebrate students' work, indicate how they can improve and have a good mix of male/female images and disabled athletes as positive role models for students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring greater consistency in the use of assessment by:
 - broadening the assessment criteria to reflect students' achievements in other outcomes especially their leadership, coaching and problem-solving skills
 - extending procedures into Key Stage 4 so that they understand their progress and how to improve further
 - ensuring that assessment data are analysed thoroughly to give a secure view of students' progress over time and to inform departmental improvement planning further
 - ensuring that teachers' observation and assessments in lessons are used consistently to give specific feedback to students on their next steps in learning
- broadening the range of experiences in the curriculum to better meet needs and interests of all students.

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

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector