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Mrs C McMahon  
Acting Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School  
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Dear Mrs McMahon

**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 my visit on 2 and 3 March 2011 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 eight lessons, one assembly and one tutorial.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is outstanding.

**Achievement in PSHE education**

Achievement in PSHE education is outstanding.

- Students have outstanding knowledge of how to stay healthy and live a safe life. They have an impressive understanding of the need to exercise with many opportunities to put this into practice. Participation in sporting activities is high.
- Students have a detailed knowledge of sex and relationships education, drugs, tobacco and alcohol misuse. They understand how to minimise risk.
- Students make good progress in developing their enterprise skills and knowledge of personal finances.
- Older students have an excellent understanding of career planning and disciplines required for the workplace. Students have clear ambitions for

the future and know what steps they need to achieve them. This begins early in Year 8.

- Many facets of the school's work contribute to the students' personal development which is outstanding. Students are given many opportunities to develop leadership skills, presentation skills and work as part of a team. They are able to discuss constructively and respect differences.

### **Quality of teaching in PSHE education**

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a range of well-chosen and skilfully prepared resources to support learning, such as, thought-provoking video clips and art work to initiate discussion.
- Lessons are well planned and structured. Students work well in pairs, independently and in groups. Very good relationships are established with students who show positive attitudes to learning.
- In the two outstanding lessons seen, teachers inspired and challenged students. Well-structured tasks lead to students being in charge of their own learning. Students showed exceptional independence, initiative and self-reflection. Teachers set high expectations and this led to excellent progress being made by students and impressive levels of commitment and enjoyment.
- Teachers create a safe learning environment of respect and tolerance so that sensitive and controversial issues are approached in a mature manner.
- Planned activities in some lessons do not always meet the needs of different groups and individual students. Students are often all doing the same activity, despite their different starting points, and more able students are not always sufficiently challenged.
- A more formal approach to the assessment and monitoring of student progress is being developed in PSHE education lessons.

### **Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education**

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is outstanding.

- The curriculum is stimulating and imaginative. It provides many opportunities for high-quality PSHE education. The abundance of a wide range of enrichment activities promotes wider personal development.
- Sixth-form students are well prepared for higher education and future life, due to a well-organised careers programme. Provision for PSHE education in the sixth form is very good and students have many opportunities to make a contribution to the school and wider community.
- Healthy Schools status has made a commendable contribution by increasing the take-up of school meals and promoting emotional development.

- Specialist sports status is a strength of the school and makes an excellent contribution to the development of healthy lifestyles. The well-established 'Bambisanani Partnership' with a school in South Africa illustrates the use of the specialism as a catalyst to develop international understanding, education, health and leadership.
- Planning for PSHE education is good with detailed schemes of work for discrete delivery.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education**

Leadership and management in PSHE education are good.

- PSHE education has a high profile and status across the school. It is placed at the heart of the school and, as a result, students thrive.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation of the different aspects of the PSHE programme take place. However, few PSHE lessons are observed. Even so, the school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses with clear priorities for PSHE education in the whole-school improvement plan.
- Subject leadership is good. Plans, mapping of the curriculum, materials and resources are continually being developed and refined.
- Coordination of the different strands of PSHE education is excellent.

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

- assessing and monitoring students' progress more formally in PSHE education
- ensuring that lessons meet the needs of different groups and individual students.

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

**Davinder Dosanjh**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**