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8 June 2011

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Dear Father Porter

Ofsted 2011–12 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 24 and 25 May 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 monitoring records; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students' personal development is outstanding. They are confident, articulate and thoughtful. They reflect on and evaluate the impact of what they have learnt through PSHE on their own behaviour, and demonstrate exceptional empathy for others. Older students feel a sense of responsibility for those who are younger and act as good role models.
- Students have an outstanding understanding of how to stay healthy, and are aware of the importance of exercise on their mental and physical health. Most take advantage of the very wide range of sporting activities provided beyond the school curriculum. They have an excellent awareness of what is meant by a balanced diet and the reasons why it is important.

- Students' awareness of how to judge and minimise risk in a range of situations is excellent. They have a range of strategies to help them resist peer pressure.
- Students' understanding of sexual and relationship issues is satisfactory.
- Their understanding of financial issues is excellent in some areas, but less secure in others.

Quality of teaching of PSHE education

The quality of teaching of PSHE education is good.

- Generally, teachers' subject knowledge is excellent because they are subject specialists for the different aspects of PSHE education; for example, drug use and misuse in science, financial planning in mathematics, and social and moral issues within religious education. When this is not the case, for example in the follow-up work on focus days, planning is done as a team, and students report that teachers are well informed.
- A wide range of resources and teaching strategies is used, such as role play, discussion and debate. Good use is made of technology, such as interactive whiteboards.
- Although some of the content of lessons in other subjects is appropriate for the PSHE curriculum, learning objectives are not sufficiently focused on PSHE. Planned activities meet the needs of different groups and individual students, although the most able are not always sufficiently challenged.
- Students are good at listening to one another, working in groups and discussing the issues raised. Relationships between students and staff are very positive and warm. The school's approach is very inclusive, with all students expected, encouraged and supported to take part in all activities including those that are extra-curricular, such as school trips and sport.
- There is no system in place to assess students' progress in PSHE education, although some assessment of subject knowledge is carried out through other subjects. Achievement is not reported to parents.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the PSHE education curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is stimulating and imaginative. It provides many opportunities for high-quality PSHE education through focus days, assemblies and extra-curricular activities. Students can recall a wide range of memorable activities, and describe its impact on their knowledge, behaviour and understanding. In particular, the sessions delivered by outside speakers are frequently of very high quality.
- Students make a very positive contribution to PSHE through their regular preparation for and participation in weekly assemblies. However, because the learning objectives are not made explicit, the guidance provided for

them is not sufficiently thorough to ensure that there is progression over time as subjects are revisited each year.

- The wide range of activities that contributes to PSHE education is carefully mapped. Much of the factual content is provided through the schemes of work for other subjects. Although teachers are aware of this, a precise match to the requirements of the PSHE curriculum is not always explicit, and PSHE outcomes are not assessed separately.
- As a result of very effective careers education, students are well prepared for the workplace.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

The effectiveness of leadership and management of PSHE education is satisfactory.

- PSHE education has a high profile across the school. Students' spiritual, social and moral development is at the heart of the school's philosophy and values, and therefore ensuring the quality of this aspect of education is a high priority for the school's leaders.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and planning focused on appropriate issues. However, there is currently no overall strategic leadership for PSHE education. Operational responsibilities are successfully shared across a wide range of senior and middle leaders and the school chaplain, who carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of the quality of focus days and the impact some of the extra-curricular activities. This results in frequent modifications to improve provision.
- The lack of a comprehensive overview means that ensuring sequential progression of learning through the year groups has had less attention than other areas. The monitoring of the delivery of PSHE through other subjects is not sufficiently robust.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing clear strategic leadership to improve the quality of monitoring, evaluation and assessment and to ensure effective progression from year to year
- ensuring that when PSHE content is taught through other subjects in the curriculum, an appropriate PSHE learning objective is provided.

I hope 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

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector