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Mr A Samways
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Dear Mr Samways

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students during my visit on 24 and 25 November 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 observations of 10 lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students show a good commitment to healthy lifestyles and are supportive of the school's drive to promote health and well-being. Many are able to set out actions they have taken personally, to improve their diet and levels of fitness. Food technology students demonstrated good levels of knowledge about food package labelling, fats and sugars in foodstuffs, nutritional standards and the impact of consumerism.
- Students have a very well-informed view and empathetic outlook about mental health; a few spoke openly of having used school-based support services and the reasons for choosing to do so. Generally, they understand the links between mental well-being and success in school and within their personal lives.

- There are gaps in students' economic knowledge such as the practicalities of opening and operating a personal bank account. Students, through their work-experience opportunities and careers guidance, have a sharp understanding of the personal qualities and characteristics needed to secure and maintain employment.
- As students journey through school, they progressively recognise the relevance and applicability of the various PSHE education strands, for example sex and relationships, e-safety, identity and peer-pressure. They convey their personal views openly and with maturity.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is good.

- Generally teachers are able to accommodate personal, social and careers-related objectives within their respective subjects but to a lesser degree economic development. Good examples of subject-based PSHE education was readily apparent in food technology, religious education, physical education, science and information and communication technology.
- Teachers manage lessons very well and allow time for students to achieve tasks individually or while working within groups. Most teachers use simple but highly effective techniques to reinforce learning or to ensure that all students contribute. In a few instances, teachers set tasks, the instructions for which students found confusing. This impaired learning.
- Learning in the subject is strengthened by very good evidence of progression and differentiation within teaching. For example, topics may be re-visited but content is not repeated and account is taken of students' growth and maturity. This approach enables and encourages a 'readiness to learn' among students.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is good.

- The curriculum sets out the aims of the subject as promoting successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. It seeks to achieve these aims in a cross-curricular manner; through the school ethos and culture, work-related and enterprise education, assemblies, tutor groups and 'de-timetabled' days. While these elements are evident, the tendency has been to add more layers to the curriculum without sufficient review.
- There is, however, considerable innovation within the curriculum, much of which works well. Examples include 'living library day' which engages professionals to run small group sessions on topics such as cancer, alcohol and sexual health; the early stage E4L employment preparation award focusing on characteristics and personal qualities needed for employment; a responsive physical education department flexible in its desire to introduce creative sport and activities; and a study centre which provides a full programme of personal and educational support to all students. The

school has been exemplary in its use of the healthy school process to underpin learning.

- Links to external agencies are good and students welcome their involvement. Managers are alert to the need to draw on external expertise where required, for example, in careers education and guidance.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education is good.

- Senior managers encourage and support innovation and the level of support given to teachers is good. They present a convincing case supporting the centrality of personal and social development to students' attainment and day-to-day well-being. There are many convincing examples of students receiving bespoke personal support to good effect.
- A coordinator, supported by an assistant headteacher, oversees elements of the subject. Other managers also contribute. Working relationships are good and effective communication supports this devolved arrangement.
- The school has mapped PSHE elements across subjects and, helpfully, across activities such as 'learner support'. However, as the delivery model has expanded over time, its formal monitoring has been too piecemeal. Moreover, insufficient opportunities have been taken to seek students' views about the quality, impact and content of the programme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the curriculum with a view to introducing greater coherence
- seeking students' views about the effectiveness of the various aspects of the PSHE curriculum.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector