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Mr D Deehan
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Dear Mr Deehan

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 30 and 31 January 2012 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 two lessons, a session to train students as mentors to younger students, and a learning walk.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students are highly articulate, reflective and analytical. They discuss very well, in small or larger groups, valuing and respecting each other's points of view.
- Students have a very good understanding of the effects of drugs, including tobacco and alcohol. They are very confident and are able to deal with peer-group pressure through the practice they have had in role-play situations.

- Students have a very good understanding of bullying, including that which is homophobic or racist, and they know what they should do if bullied by others.
- Students have a good understanding of sexual development, but their awareness of relationships is less consistent as is their learning about effective parenting.
- Students understand the importance of a balanced diet, but they are less clear about what it should consist of. They know that exercise is essential and why. Many students take part in the wider range of sporting activities. They have a secure understanding of mental health, including a growing awareness of how to recognise and deal with stress.
- Students are making good progress in learning how to manage their money and they have developed their awareness of the world of work well. Throughout the school, students are prepared well for the next stage of their education and their future adult life. Older students are given a wide range of opportunities to take responsibility in the life of the school, for example as mentors to younger students.
- All students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress in these areas.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is good.

- Teachers' confidence and subject knowledge have improved as a result of training and support. They plan lessons that have clear objectives and use a variety of different teaching approaches and resources, which make lessons interesting. They are positive and enthusiastic, and their relationships with students are very good.
- Teachers encourage students to become actively involved in lessons and to discuss and think for themselves. In a lesson where students were training others to become mentors to younger students, the teacher ensured that there was suitable challenge for everyone, creating outstanding learning for both the trainers and trainees. However, in a minority of lessons, the challenge for some students, particularly the most able, is insufficient.
- Teachers know how well their students are progressing and they use targets to help them improve. Students regularly review their own success, although this does not always indicate how well they are achieving.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is good.

- The curriculum has been carefully planned. It ensures that all students benefit from a wide range of topics, linked to their work in other subjects where appropriate.

- The suspended timetable days have been carefully planned in consultation with students, to make sure that students have extra opportunities in areas that are important or interest them.
- The very extensive extra-curricular programme is very well supported by students and makes a significant impact on their high levels of personal development.
- Students in the sixth form benefit from a broad, relevant and interesting programme that meets their needs well.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

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

- Very good support from senior staff ensures that PSHE is a high priority for the school.
- Leadership is well informed and enthusiastic, evident in a good record of innovation, including a new scheme of work and the introduction of suspended timetable days.
- Good self-evaluation and action plans are in place, although these are not currently informed by assessment information.
- Very well-developed links with the local community help to make the curriculum more interesting and relevant, for example, links with local businesses and the use of visitors for individual lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that lessons meet the needs of all students, including those who are most able
- making use of assessment to inform action plans.

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.

Yours sincerely

Susan Orpin
Additional Inspector