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Mr M Barker
Principal
Ashcroft Technology Academy
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Dear Mr Barker

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 5 and 6 March 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 three lessons, an assembly and a lunchtime activity.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is outstanding.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is outstanding.

- Students are extremely articulate, analytical and reflective. They discuss and debate together very well, both in lessons and socially around the school. They have the confidence to disagree, while respecting the differing views of others.
- Students have a very good understanding of drugs, including tobacco and alcohol. They understand how to deal with peer-group pressure and have practised using their skills in role-play situations.
- Students have a very good understanding of bullying, including that which is homophobic or transphobic. They know what they should do if bullied by others or have witnessed bullying taking place.

- Students have an extremely good understanding of sexual development, relationships and the importance of responsible parenting.
- Students have a very good understanding of how to stay healthy, both through a balanced diet and regular exercise. They are extremely knowledgeable about mental health and they understand the importance of tolerance and empathy for those suffering mental health issues.
- Students are making very good progress in learning how to manage their money and they have a very well developed awareness of the world of work. Throughout the school, students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and their future adult life. Sixth form students are given a wide range of opportunities to take responsibility in the life of the school, for example as peer-readers to younger students.
- All students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make very good progress in these areas.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is outstanding.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and is used very well to make lessons interesting and relevant to students.
- Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and activities are varied, with good use of information and communication technology. For example, in a lesson about teenage pregnancy, students were given a variety of activities to help them think about the responsibility of being a teenage parent, including the use of a video clip which helped them consider the feelings of boys and girls who have become teenage parents.
- Teachers encourage students to think for themselves, using the high level of knowledge and understanding acquired during lessons. They make sure that all students are suitably challenged by the work they are doing.
- Teachers use a variety of assessments very well to plan their lessons and help students know what to do to improve. Students' work is marked very carefully and they have targets for improvement. However, students do not always know how well they are doing.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is outstanding.

- The curriculum is extremely well planned and flexible, covering a broad range of relevant topics and enabling staff and students to suggest ideas and changes. A detailed scheme of work ensures that students make very good progress in lessons.
- Very well developed links with the local community help to make the curriculum more interesting and relevant. For example, Year 10 students have successfully been involved in the Youth and Philanthropy project, enabling them to develop their social and economic skills through work with a local charity.

- A very wide range of visitors, trips and extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum extremely well. For example, the visit from a survivor of Auschwitz had a notable impact on students' spiritual and moral development.
- Sixth form students benefit from a highly relevant and interesting programme that meets their needs extremely well. They are encouraged to set their aspirations high in all they do, for example, some sixth form students were selected to be part of the Attorney General's youth working group.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

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

- Very good support from senior staff ensures that PSHE education is a high priority for the school.
- Leadership is very well informed and enthusiastic, evident in the very good record of innovation, and the extremely cohesive and well-trained team of staff.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and there is a clear vision for the subject. Provision is monitored extremely well in a variety of ways, ensuring that it improves continuously.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a strategy that will give assessment overall direction and cohesion, thereby helping students to know how well they are doing.

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