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20 March 2012

Mrs C White
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs White

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 13 and 14 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 four lessons and an assembly.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is satisfactory with some good features.

- Students have good knowledge and understanding of how to eat healthily and the physical and psychological benefits of exercise. They understand the role of the media in influencing judgements on body image and the consequences of poor nutrition. They think critically, express their opinions with confidence and listen respectfully to others.
- Students' understanding of sex and relationship education (SRE) is satisfactory rather than good because there is too little teaching about relationships. They learn about the misuse of alcohol and drugs and the effects of tobacco but are less secure in knowing how to resist peer-pressure. Stress and mental health issues are discussed and students explore eating disorders. All know who to go to for more information to talk about a personal issue. At Key Stage 4, those taking food technology or health and social care options have deeper learning experiences.

- Students understand well aspects of business, enterprise, money management and careers and they develop skills through enterprise activities. Older students do work experience, sample teaching at a local college and take part in mock interviews.
- Students understand the impact of cyber-bullying, racism and bullying based on a person's appearance. However, they are much less sure about the negative impact of homophobic or disablist language.
- Students have a strong voice in the school and the work of the Executive Council is high profile and valued. Approximately 20% of students are directly engaged in leadership activities that help to build their self-esteem, confidence and communication skills.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is satisfactory.

- Teachers are enthusiastic but their subject expertise in PSHE education is variable because they have not received subject-specific training, including in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Some use questioning well to assess understanding and deepen learning. Others who are less confident ask more closed questions and do not allow for thinking time.
- Lesson objectives are clear and appropriate and materials are well prepared by the subject leader. Some lessons deploy strategies such as quizzes and simulations. However, much of the teaching follows a similar formula of interactive whiteboard presentation and tasks that a team of teachers can follow. The tasks help students to develop their critical thinking skills and make informed judgements. However, not all are sufficiently skilled and confident to act on those judgements.
- Teachers know how well students are doing; work is marked and commented on and progress is reported to parents and carers.
- Students value highly the teaching by external contributors. The input from the local community police officer on cyber-bullying and drugs, and the crime and punishment day provided memorable experiences.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is satisfactory with good features.

- The programme at Key Stage 3 is comprehensive and meets statutory requirements but at Key Stage 4 the depth of learning depends on students' option choices. Planning does not draw on local data or previous knowledge from Key Stage 2 and is not routinely informed by the views of staff, students, parents and carers.
- In SRE, changes during puberty, reproduction, sexually transmitted infection, contraception, abortion and pregnancy are well covered. But there is less emphasis on gender stereotyping, peer-pressure, sexual consent, high-risk behaviours and parenting.

- The programme for economic well-being is strong in Key Stage 3 and sound in Key Stage 4. Enrichment activities such as leadership opportunities, performing arts, clubs and charity fundraising play a strong part in developing students' communication and social skills.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are assisted in lessons by support staff. Work with outside agencies helps to support those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable but alternative or bespoke PSHE education programmes are not provided.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

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

- The leadership team has an ambitious vision for PSHE education but it has not been a key priority to date. The subject is well supported in terms of curriculum time at Key Stage 3 and subject leadership inspires confidence and commitment from the teaching team.
- Teaching and learning are monitored through learning walks and book scrutiny but the analysis has not yet informed improvement planning.
- PSHE education contributes to the school's duty to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Capacity to improve is good because school leaders and managers are now in a position to prioritise PSHE education and have plans in place to do so.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the curriculum at Key stage 4 deepens students' understandings and improves their resilience to peer-pressure
- developing students' understanding of the impact of homophobic, transphobic and disablist language
- ensuring that curriculum planning is strategic and informed by data.

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

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector