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Mr M Callagher
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Callagher

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE education)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 2 and 3 May 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 eight lessons, an assembly and tutorial period.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students speak warmly of their enjoyment of PSHE lessons and they understand well the factors affecting their health and well-being. This is enhanced by the chef and the canteen team who encourage students to suggest and explore healthy alternatives to their favourite dishes. Their understanding of healthy lifestyles is further demonstrated by the high uptake of sporting activities that the school's specialist Sports college status has engendered.
- Students have a good understanding of issues related to drugs, alcohol and tobacco misuse. They have a healthy attitude to staying safe and understand how to manage risk. For example, Year 10 students are able to explain how to avoid unsafe situations when they are out with friends.

They are equally knowledgeable about keeping themselves safe when using social networking sites on the internet.

- The school has been successful in helping students to develop a strong understanding of the physical and emotional aspects of sex and relationships. This is because lessons are carefully planned to suit the age and ability of students.
- A well-developed sense of right and wrong informs students' understanding of how different forms of bullying can affect themselves and others; and they are clear about their responsibilities should they come across any form of bullying or discrimination.
- Students have a detailed understanding of the personal qualities and skills they need to maintain employment and live independently. All in Key Stage 4 gain qualifications in employability and working life. This helps them to develop vital economic skills, such as how to open a bank account and manage different forms of credit.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is good.

- Teachers adopt a wide range of active and interesting strategies; this engages students' interest and helps them to participate confidently in discussions. However, teachers sometimes dominate the discussion and not all students participate as well as they could. Teachers assess students' work regularly and provide helpful and well-judged feedback.
- Sensitive issues are tackled with confidence which ensures that students are able to ask questions. For example, in a childcare lesson, Year 10 students developed their understanding of the importance of confidentiality through a board game. This provoked good-quality discussion and enabled the students to learn from each other.
- Teachers have high expectations and students respond well to this. Students value the subject, they are proud of the work they do and present it carefully.
- The work students do in small groups and pairs is well-managed and they develop good team skills. However, teachers do not always plan their questions thoroughly enough and consequently the most able are not always sufficiently challenged and the least able occasionally struggle.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is good.

- The curriculum is cohesive, comprehensive and meets statutory requirements. Different subjects across the school support well the effective overall provision.
- The emphasis on developing students' confidence, social skills and financial capability has resulted in almost all students successfully securing further education, employment or training. Enhancements to the

curriculum ensure that the needs of students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and those with disabilities or special educational needs are met well. For example, a group of Year 9 boys at risk of underachievement have benefited from a programme which supports them in developing positive attitudes to learning.

- The school has a flexible approach to the curriculum and responds to the needs of different cohorts. However, the opportunity to use local data has not been adopted routinely to inform the curriculum content.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

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

- The Directors of Learning form an effective team and place a high priority on the delivery of PSHE education. Senior leaders ensure that sufficient time is given to enable good delivery through a variety of subjects across the curriculum. For example, in religious education teachers offer students opportunities to discuss personal and moral issues affecting their own lives and those of others.
- Leaders and managers regularly review and monitor the quality of lessons and students' work. They provide useful feedback to teachers and rigorously follow up any underperformance. However, this is not yet used systematically to inform further subject training for teachers.
- Leaders place a high priority on PSHE education. Staff and students have very positive attitudes towards the subject and these lead to students' good achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the professional development of teachers to ensure an excellent understanding of current best practice in PSHE education
- ensuring teachers plan lessons that better meet the needs of individual students through improved questioning techniques
- making systematic use of local data to ensure that the curriculum meets students' needs.

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

Joan Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector