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Mr R Whittaker
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Whittaker

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 the staff and students, during my visit on 13 and 14 June 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 six lessons and a tutorial session.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is satisfactory

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is satisfactory.

- Students have a good awareness of different types of bullying, especially cyber bullying. Younger students and those in the sixth form have a well-developed understanding of their responsibilities should they come across any form of bullying or discrimination. However, this is not as strong in Key Stage 4.
- Students' achievement in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form is better overall than that in Key Stage 4 where there are some gaps in students' knowledge. For example, in Year 10, students' understanding of the link between body image and the media is limited.

- Students enjoy the contribution of a wide range of visitors who engage their interest and develop their knowledge, particularly on the impact of the misuse of alcohol, drugs and tobacco.
- Carefully tailored intervention enables students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to make good progress in developing social skills and self-awareness. Students with disabilities and those with special educational needs make similar levels of progress to their peers.
- Overall students have a sound knowledge of the factors which help them to maintain healthy lifestyles. The 'Learn to Learn' programme in Key Stage 3 promotes good strategies to build and maintain relationships and supports the development of their independent learning skills.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Students value sessions on independent living skills such as cooking on a budget and dealing with personal finance. However, in the main school, students' financial capabilities are less strong, especially in Key Stage 4.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is satisfactory.

- Teachers adopt a range of active and interesting strategies which encourages students to engage confidently in discussions. However, teachers sometimes dominate discussions and not all participate as well as they could.
- Objectives for lessons are appropriate and teachers routinely identify those who need additional support. However, actions to meet learning needs are not always planned well enough to ensure that the most able students are sufficiently challenged.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is varied. There are some very strong examples, particularly in Key Stage 3 where teachers skilfully extend and challenge students' thinking. This is not consistent however, and these opportunities are sometimes missed.
- In Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, assessment is embedded. Detailed feedback to students provides them with precise detail of what they have done well and the next steps they should take to improve. However, in Key Stage 4, where PSHE education is delivered through other subjects, teachers do not formally identify attainment and progress and students rarely receive feedback on how well they are doing.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is satisfactory.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form is good. In these areas students develop higher order thinking skills and become reflective and resilient learners; assessment is embedded and helps students and teachers to see where there is underachievement and take effective action.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is weaker. It is delivered through other subjects and enhanced in 20-minute tutorial sessions. These are planned and delivered well but the time is insufficient to allow students to explore issues in depth. Work in other subjects varies in quality resulting in gaps in students' knowledge and skills.
- The inclusive nature of the school is evidenced in the broad uptake of extra-curricular activities and the tolerant and harmonious atmosphere. Students from diverse backgrounds and beliefs work well together and value the difference others bring to the community.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

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

- Leaders and managers place a high priority on the delivery of PSHE education. They have introduced some effective changes in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form but weaknesses remain in the curriculum in Key Stage 4. The school's evaluation of PSHE education is accurate.
- Tutorial sessions are monitored but with insufficient focus on the quality of PSHE education. In Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, quality assurance of the subject is more rigorous and informs improvement and training. In these areas teachers are confident and tackle the teaching of sensitive subjects well. Although the school reviews and monitors the quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 4, this information is not used systematically to identify how well the subject is taught across different curriculum areas or used to inform subject training needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on the good practice established in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form to improve the curriculum for PSHE education in Key Stage 4
- ensuring that teachers plan and teach lessons to better meet the needs of individuals and provide opportunities for students to discuss their ideas
- ensuring that PSHE education is assessed effectively across the school
- improving the monitoring and evaluation of PSHE education across the school to ensure that there are no gaps in students' knowledge and skills.

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