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7 July 2012

Mr J Brindle
Principal
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Dear Mr Brindle

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 26 and 27 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 observations of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students have a good understanding of PSHE education concepts, particularly in areas such as healthy lifestyles, body image, homophobia, e-safety and bullying. In the best instances, students grasp the personal as well as the societal relevance of such issues.
- Most articulate well what they have learnt in PSHE education activities and express their opinions effectively. They are often able to pinpoint small but significant changes in, for instance, their diet or attitudes towards other people. A minority lack the skills needed to manage personal challenges of this nature.

- Projects such as 'Youth Health Champions' support learning well. Those involved have gained an acute understanding of the impact of issues such as alcohol misuse and mental health. Visits by the health champions to primary schools involve workshops and campaigns and have enabled younger children and their parents and carers to hear about the high school's approach to healthy eating and the sport and fitness options available.
- Good and frequent links with external agencies have helped develop students' knowledge of where to seek specialist help and support should the need arise.
- In relation to their age, students have a good understanding of how to manage money and bank accounts. They are aware of the range of further education, training and work-related learning options open to them.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and most are able to create a suitably constructive atmosphere in lessons which lends itself well to exploring PSHE education issues. Teachers ensure that students adhere to ground rules in class thereby enabling discussion about potentially controversial issues to take place in a secure environment.
- Elements of PSHE education are taught through mainstream subjects. Effective examples were seen in English, where students considered the concepts of 'challenge and clarification' in relation to racism, and in a practical food technology lesson, which illustrated well the amounts of sugar contained in processed foods.
- In the less successful examples, teachers set overambitious objectives in relation to the PSHE education elements of the lesson or found it difficult to convey or explain concepts in a sufficiently clear manner.
- Specialist PSHE education experience is evident but dispersed among the staff. Those delivering the Year 7 and 8 'life and learning' course demonstrate a good range of skills and flexibility. The lessons are enjoyable and constructive.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is satisfactory.

- The curriculum spans the PSHE education 'life and learning' course, tutorial activities for all students and mainstream lessons. Occasional 'flexi days' events, often provided by external agencies, cover particular subject aspects. Given the size of the school, this structure makes sense. Overall however, it is not sufficiently coherent, particularly in relation to the role of mainstream subjects.
- Inputs from external agencies are well managed with students commenting positively about having attended various memorable and useful workshops.

- The 'life and learning' scheme of work is well presented, simple in its execution and links to other priorities such as literacy. It is organised around termly themes including money, health and internet safety. In contrast, the cross-curricular scheme fails to capture the PSHE education outcomes being sought within mainstream lessons.
- Assessment is not sufficiently coherent, which weakens the effectiveness of the curriculum. While teachers have expectations that students contribute fully to lessons, they are less clear about the levels of learning and progress in PSHE education commensurate with students' ages and abilities.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

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

- School managers, teachers and support staff have a strong, collective commitment to students' personal and social development. Adequate curriculum time and resources are dedicated to the subject and required policies are in place. The subject supports the school's pastoral work well.
- A systematic, needs-led professional development programme that has included PSHE education is nearing the end of its first annual cycle.
- A member of the senior leadership team is charged with improving the school's overall PSHE education strategy and secure plans are in place to employ a subject leader. Current specialist expertise, however, is not being sufficiently drawn upon.
- Recent improvements to management systems, including the monitoring of teaching and learning, are proving fruitful. Generally, teachers are supportive of this approach and are keen on continual improvement. Useful externally provided evaluations of PSHE education partnership events present an informative overview.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- drawing upon the subject expertise within the staff team to review the curriculum, before management decisions about structural changes
- improving assessment and reporting.

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

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector