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Mrs Cogan
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Dear Mrs Cogan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 12-13 October 2006 to look at work in PSHE.

As outlined in my initial letter, the focus of my visit was on the following aspect: assessment and reporting strategies.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our evaluation and reporting. Any published report is likely to list the names of the institutions visited, but we would not identify individual institutions within the report itself.

The evidence used to inform the judgements I made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of school documentation including self evaluation documentation, analysis of pupils' work, observation of four lessons and an assembly.

I undertook to provide a brief written version of the main points made in my feedback at the end of the visit, to support development in PSHE. This follows:

The overall effectiveness of PSHE was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards in PSHE are outstanding.

- The carefully considered curriculum culminates in very high levels of social skills and understanding by the time the pupils reach the sixth form. Pupils

are analytical and able to express their opinions with clarity. They understand well their own, and others', feelings, attitudes and values.

- Pupils are keenly aware of their rights and responsibilities, show great interest in their PSHE work and are clear how it relates to their lives now and in the future. They are given genuine responsibilities at every level of school life.
- Through PSHE pupils develop and practice essential life skills to help them make a positive contribution, adapt to changes in themselves and changes to personal circumstances.
- Pupils are very well informed about healthy lifestyles. They enjoy taking regular exercise, encouraged by the provision of a wide range of leisure and sports activities. A balanced life-style is promoted through the celebration of fun and cultural activities, stress management and self esteem modules and easy access to the school nurse and other advisors.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and the confidence to tackle sensitive and controversial issues. Teachers plan well to meet the needs of all pupils and use a range of appropriate strategies. Pupils respond well to lessons which are taught in a safe, secure and supportive environment.

The quality of the PSHE curriculum is outstanding.

- The PSHE curriculum extends throughout the school and is both comprehensive and coherent. It is well supported and successfully taught through a range of subjects and through the excellent extra-curricular provision.
- PSHE knowledge, understanding and skills continues to be developed in the sixth form where pupils take full advantage of the many opportunities to participate and take responsible action.

Care guidance and support are outstanding.

- The recently refurbished and restocked library provides a good range of PSHE related materials, advice and careers guidance. Pupils' PSHE folders include contact numbers and addresses informing them where they can go for further advice and information.
- Provision for guidance and support on personal issues is very effective and ranges from peer mentoring and buddying between pupils to learning mentors, form tutors, heads of year and the school nurse.

Subject leadership and management

Leadership and management of PSHE are outstanding.

- The subject coordinator is experienced and well qualified for the position and is very well supported by the senior management team. She has a clear vision for PSHE which is communicated well to the rest of the school.
- Development plans and schemes of work are of high quality. The assessment of pupils' progress is very well managed within and beyond the curriculum. Teaching and learning is thoroughly monitored and appropriate action is taken where support is required.
- The subject is well resource in terms of time, staffing, training, visiting speakers and material resources. PSHE has a high profile in the school amongst both staff and pupils.

Subject issue – assessment and reporting

Assessment is seen as central to the PSHE curriculum. The department sets clear expectations of standards and achievement which are well communicated to pupils and parents. Class work and homework are regularly marked by teachers and pupils are fully engaged in self assessment and personal target setting.

Assessment in PSHE is part of the whole school approach to monitoring progress. It is well planned for, in both PSHE lessons and when PSHE is being taught through other subjects. At the beginning of each module teachers assess the levels of pupils' knowledge and the needs of the group to ensure they can judge their progress effectively.

Inclusion

The school has recently received a well deserved Inclusion Award. In PSHE the standards achieved by all pupils are high and their attitudes to learning and personal development are excellent.

The formal and wider curriculum is accessible to all pupils and participation is carefully monitored by form teachers (assisted by form captains) to ensure no pupils miss out. Bursary schemes are in place to give all pupils the opportunity to access trips regardless of family income. The school is very well led and managed for the benefit of all its pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- better focussed lesson planning to ensure learning outcomes are clear and appropriate.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop PSHE in the school.

As I explained, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Authority and will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools