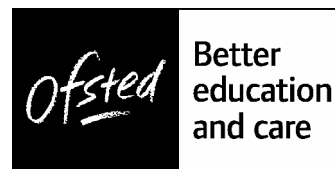


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr C Tomlinson
Headteacher
Chafford Hundred Campus School
Mayflower Road
Chafford Hundred
Essex
RM16 6SA

Dear Mr Tomlinson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 and 18 October 2006. At the end of the visit I fed back my conclusions and this letter confirms those findings.

Context and background

Chafford Hundred Campus opened as a new school in September 2001. It was built up with a new intake each year until 2005 when all year groups were complete. The school is significantly oversubscribed and pupils start with overall average attainment although this varies from year group to year group.

The school was founded on an ethos of innovation and creativity particularly in relation to the curriculum. Key Stage 3 has been developed from the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) 'Opening Minds' curriculum project and is based on an integrated approach using RSA competencies. This is delivered in topic sessions: nine in Year 7; eight in Year 8 and six in Year 9 covering all subjects except: languages, design technology, PE and performing arts.

The school is a Business and Enterprise college and this impacts on all aspects of the curriculum. For example in Year 10 all pupils take part in a work related learning activity one day a week. In addition to the integrated curriculum the school provides a wide range of subjects and courses with considerable flexible choice from Year 8 and into Key Stage 4.

Achievement and standards

The school's first Key Stage 3 national test results in 2004 were significantly better than average and pupils made good progress. In 2005 results dropped and were well below those of the previous year. Pupils made inadequate

progress across the key stage. In 2006 results have improved although not back to 2004 levels in English and mathematics.

In 2006 the school received its first set of GCSE results and were just above the national average. This performance masked some wide differences in individual subjects. In particular English results were poor and pupils did not make adequate progress from Key Stage 3. However, in mathematics results were good and pupils made good progress.

Personal development

Pupils enjoy coming to school and learning. They appreciate the integrated curriculum and are keen to be involved and take full part in their lessons. Lessons are longer than usual but pupils find the time passes quickly. One pupil, surprised when it was lunchtime, remarked "has it really gone that quickly?" Pupils are now used to the integrated approach and like it because they are actively involved. However, they can become restless where lessons are too teacher directed.

Older pupils speak very positively about the school and the choices they can make. They understand how the competency based approach helps them to develop skills which will be of great benefit to them throughout their lives. The campus council is a well supported, effective group that manages its own budget and has considerable influence in the school.

PROVISION

Teaching

Teaching in the majority of lessons is lively and active and teachers use a wide variety of teaching strategies. In the best lessons pupils know and understand what they are going to learn and are keen to achieve. The teachers involved in the integrated curriculum are enthusiastic and appreciate that it is necessary to work with their pupils in a different way and like the new relationships established. This is supported by detailed and thorough planning that makes it easy for new teachers to settle into this style of teaching.

In the majority of lessons pupils' behaviour is well managed and encourages them to work and learn. However, where teaching is not as interesting and engaging as it should be pupils easily become bored and behaviour deteriorates.

Curriculum

The school's values and ethos are applied effectively to underpin the popular Key Stage 3 integrated curriculum. The pupils also appreciate the extensive range of subjects and courses on offer from Year 8 and this is a strength of

the school. A considerable element of personalised learning results from these arrangements. For example, pupils can be 'fast-tracked' successfully through GCSE allowing the more able to start A/S level courses in Year 11.

While the integrated curriculum is fully in place in Key Stage 3, transitions between Key Stage 2 / 3 and Key Stage 3/ 4 are not developed fully enough to secure progression in skill development across the key stages.

Care, guidance and support

Pupils are well supported by the school. The one-to-one tutorial system is very effective and encourages good relationships between staff and pupils. Careers education is good and the pupils have a clear view of what they will do when they leave the school. From Year 8, pupils are involved in making decisions regarding their work and they start to make choices about the courses they wish to study.

The school has a comprehensive system of tracking pupils' progress against the competencies. This is recorded electronically and accessible to both pupils and staff and can be used by pupils to showcase their work. There is a tension between the values and principles of the integrated curriculum and national assessment reporting requirements. While the more developmental aspects of assessment work well for the pupils, analysis of progress against external criteria lacks sufficient rigour to give a clear picture of progress against national levels.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership maintains a clear and persistent vision for the direction of the curriculum despite some significant staff changes. The enthusiastic staff support innovation but not all are fully aware of the methodologies of the integrated curriculum, especially where they are not involved in its delivery. There has been insufficient focus on monitoring of standards and teaching, especially where staff are inexperienced, for example in English at Key Stage 4.

The school maintains a delicate balance between resources, staffing and the extensive curriculum provision. However, many classes, at Key Stage 4 in particular, are very small and may not be financially viable in the longer term.

Overall

Strengths:

- the pupils understand the underlying reasons for integrated curriculum. They are active, fully involved and understand the potential benefits for their future learning

- the highly innovative curriculum is underpinned by strong vision and values that enthuse and motivate pupils
- the breadth of curriculum provision and wide choice of subjects and courses
- teachers are very keen participants and are very supportive of the innovation
- one-to-one tutoring is very successful.

Issues for consideration:

- all staff need to be thoroughly familiar with the methodologies of the integrated curriculum even if they are not involved in teaching the topics
- ensure that reports to parents meet statutory requirements for example in citizenship
- improve the rigour of monitoring to ensure high standards and raise achievement.

I do hope you find these comments useful. I look forward to being updated on current developments as you continue with your curriculum innovations.

Yours sincerely

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools