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Mr B McWilliams
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Dear Mr McWilliams

Ofsted survey inspection programme – physical education and mathematics.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the joint visit of Gill Close HMI and myself on 07 and 08 November 2006 to look at work in physical education (PE) and mathematics.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of PE and mathematics lessons.

Physical education

The overall effectiveness of PE was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory at Key Stage 3.

- Standards achieved in Key Stage 3 are in line with the national average. Year 9 pupils show effective footwork and sending and receiving skills in netball. Year 8 pupils demonstrate a range of balancing actions in gymnastics and work well with others to practice and refine their work.

- Key Stage 4 PE was not observed on this visit. GCSE PE results were well below average in 2006 because pupils were not given adequate guidance or support and most under-achieved. A small proportion of Year 11 pupils achieved an award in sports leadership.
- Pupils enjoy PE but told inspectors that they would like to wear tracksuit bottoms in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 but its effectiveness in Key Stage 4 is not clear.

- Teachers develop good relations with pupils and ensure that most participate and enjoy PE.
- Class management is effective; pupils cooperate with each other, display positive attitudes and behave well.
- Questioning and demonstrations are used well to motivate pupils but on occasions, too much work is planned for one lesson.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to evaluate how well they and others are doing and to review what they can do to improve their work.
- No Key Stage 4 lessons are taught by teachers from the school, this is delegated to qualified coaches at the local leisure centre. The school does not monitor or evaluate the quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 4.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but it is inadequate at Key Stage 4.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad, balanced and makes good use of the limited facilities available.
- Key Stage 4 lessons are taught by qualified coaches at the local leisure centre. There is insufficient evidence to show that pupils are meeting National Curriculum requirements by studying at least two areas of activity in depth.
- Curriculum time in both key stages is minimal; a significant number of pupils do not achieve the PESSCL national target of two hours of high quality PE and sport each week.
- Pupils speak positively about the range of activities on offer during lunchtimes and after-school.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate.

- Day to day management is generally sound but there is no clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision because self-evaluation lacks rigour and too little time is spent on monitoring and evaluating the achievement of pupils.
- The school leadership team has recognised that teachers are not sufficiently focused on raising achievement in PE and has put in place additional procedures to monitor how well the department is doing, but it is too early to see any impact of this yet.
- It is not clear how Key Stage 4 provision is monitored and evaluated against National Curriculum requirements or how assessment is used to support their learning further.

The Physical Education School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy

- The PESSCL national strategy is having a satisfactory impact on improving the quality of provision in PE and school sport through effective support for teachers, organised sports festivals and developing an increasing number of after school clubs. Pupils can train to become junior sports leaders and increasing numbers now access competitive inter-school sport in the local area. It is having a minimal effect on assisting the majority of pupils to achieve the minimum national target of two hours of high quality PE and sport each week.

Inclusion

- Most pupils make sufficient progress in Key Stage 3 but some pupils under-achieve in Key Stage 4 because their progress is not effectively monitored. Curricular and enrichment activities are open to pupils from all ethnic backgrounds and many participate in lunchtime and after school clubs. Pupils of all abilities who are eager to improve their fitness or lose weight are encouraged to join in after-school walking and running club. Talented pupils are provided with additional support to excel in their chosen sports and to acquire coaching awards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- evaluate thoroughly the current strengths and weaknesses of the department, particularly Key Stage 4 provision and prepare a coherent improvement plan to raise the achievement of all pupils and ensure all National Curriculum requirements are met
- identify clear roles and responsibilities for improving teaching and learning, developing the curriculum and monitoring pupil progress
- make better use of assessment in lessons to gauge pupil progress and provide them with an understanding of what they need to do to improve
- improve teaching and learning in GCSE PE to secure improved results
- seek the views of pupils on what would improve provision in PE.

Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Pupils make good progress to reach broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 4. Progress is outstanding during Key Stage 3.
- In 2006, the small number of students following level 3 courses in the sixth form made below expected progress and those studying the key skills numeracy course were not entered for the examination.
- Pupils behave well and work hard. They have good relationships with each other and staff. They feel confident to ask questions but show limited independence and responsibility for their own learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- The combined provision of teaching in lessons and support within and outside lessons helps pupils to make good progress.
- Strong aspects of teaching are the confident use of interactive whiteboards, clear explanation, supportive individual help, well-focused pair tasks and discussion of a variety of methods for solving problems.
- Sometimes pupils' progress is not monitored closely enough during lessons so they are not challenged or their misconceptions are not identified quickly.
- Pupils are not always sure what each of them should achieve during a lesson or how well they have done.
- The twice-yearly assessments provide reliable data for tracking attainment, and target setting has helped pupils and teachers to aim high.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- A good range of software for use with interactive whiteboards is well linked to schemes of work, which are broad and underpin pupils' good progress.
- Support outside lessons and for revision is good, including residential weekends for targeted groups.

- Systems do not ensure that each pupil receives entitlement to a sufficient range of hands-on computer use, investigatory work or conceptual approaches to topics to enhance their understanding.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The focus on raising standards and progress has been effective.
- Monitoring and line management systems have identified areas of weakness and addressed them successfully. However, there is room for development planning to define success criteria more clearly in terms of quality.
- Distributed responsibility amongst experienced practitioners and strong team work are enhancing consistency, for example in assessment, and enabling good practice to be shared.
- Specialist science and mathematics college status has contributed to the greatly increased use of computer software in teaching. Targets have been largely met in attainment and primary school outreach work.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils' understanding is not as strong as their ability to obtain correct answers, which is well supported by the clearly presented and well-structured examples they are given. Opportunities to enhance understanding of the concepts behind the methods are missed. Pupils say they enjoy practical work and challenging tasks when they are given them. Sometimes they spend too long listening or copying information, so they have too little time to think for themselves.

Inclusion

All groups of pupils make good progress because of the support provided by the school and the caring environment in which every pupil feels free to ask for help whenever they wish. Nevertheless, pupils do not always have equal access to work that challenges them or to hands-on use of computers in mathematics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise the quality of teaching so that all pupils are challenged to think and understand, and their misconceptions are quickly identified
- increase pupils' independence and responsibility for learning through frequent self-assessment
- sharpen development planning, with a clear focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop PE and mathematics in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector