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Dear Mrs Quayle

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Physical Education and Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during the joint visit of Jenny Smith, HMI and myself on 13 and 14 November 2006 to look at work in Geography and Physical Education (PE).

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 lessons.

Geography

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are above the national average, with a high proportion of pupils reaching L6 and above.
- Smaller support groups in Years 7-9 have helped to raise standards considerably.
- Standards in GCSE were around the national average in 2006, having risen significantly from results 2005. Pupils of all abilities make good progress from Year 7 to Year 11. However, girls considerably outperformed boys at GCSE.

- Standards in the sixth form were disappointing, with a number of pupils failing to gain a pass at AS Level, whilst those completing the two year A Level course reached standards that were broadly in line with the national average.
- Achievement in lessons is generally good with pupils making good progress. Pupils have a good understanding of geographical processes and can apply their knowledge to a variety of new situations.
- Behaviour was good in all lessons observed. Pupils were keen to learn and understood the high expectations of teachers.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is good.

- Lessons observed were well planned with a variety of activities, which maintained pupils' interest. The activities linked well to each other and enabled pupils to build on prior learning in the subject. Occasionally, the pace of some activities was too fast for the pupils to consolidate fully their learning as the lesson progressed.
- Teachers' questioning techniques were good and ensured that the majority of pupils were drawn into effective discussion. Good subject knowledge ensured lessons focused on up to date information. Teachers made very good use of starter activities and often used plenary sessions to draw learning together.
- Good attention is paid to literacy issues and pupils are actively encouraged to use correct geographical terminology, committing key definitions to a glossary for future use.
- Good use was made of the interactive whiteboard and LCD projector, especially for visual stimulus. However, there was little evidence in pupils' work of them having opportunities to use technology for example for data collection interrogation or research.
- Pupils reported that their geography teachers provide very good explanations and that teachers were always willing to give further guidance where they were unsure about something.
- The support groups use too many worksheets. These pupils would benefit from more opportunities for extended writing.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work are generally good, including those of the sixth form, especially so where cross-curricular themes, differentiation and literacy are addressed. There is still some reworking of Year 9 scheme of work to be undertaken.
- Fieldwork plays a key role across year groups, pupils have gained a great deal from this but enquiry-based approaches have not sufficiently underpinned the fieldwork exercises.

- Appropriate new initiatives linked to geography are now being explored through the BTEC travel and tourism course. Further exploration into how the business studies and physical education departments can support these developments would be beneficial.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The department is well led and managed and teachers work very well together, learning from each other as evidenced in departmental meetings.
- Monitoring and evaluation in the department is very effective and a thorough appraisal of examination results takes place.
- The department is well supported by its aims to celebrate a rich cultural and ethnic diversity and this was effectively witnessed in the lessons observed.

Subject issue: global dimension

The quality of provision in this area is good.

- The schemes of work support the exploration of global issues well and a new unit of work 'saving the planet' based on the production of a bag of crisps is an excellent example.
- The school has achieved a British Council International award for its many international links.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Good provision is made for Year 8 and 9 in the form of smaller support groups, which have a positive impact on standards by the end of Year 9.
- Excellent inclusive practice was observed in one class where Lithuanian and Bangladeshi pupils were making an excellent first-hand presentation to the class about the countries from which they came.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- explore further the use of enquiry-based approaches in fieldwork exercises
- consider the possible links with other departments, such as PE and business studies to support the proposed BTEC travel and tourism course.

Physical Education

The overall effectiveness of PE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in PE is good.

- Progress observed in lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good, with students of all abilities achieving well.
- Overall, a significant number of students have not achieved their predicted grades at Key Stage 4 in recent years. This has been attributed to a variety of factors and a number of appropriate actions have been taken to help raise achievement. For example, the change to a BTEC course to better meet the needs of students, increases to the theory content in Year 11 GCSE and enabling students to more readily access PE through repositioning in the option structure for 2007. However it is too early to judge the impact of these changes on raising standards.
- Students enjoy PE in all Key Stages and have positive attitudes towards their learning. Very good opportunities are provided for personal development through assuming a variety of roles in lessons and access to leadership accreditation courses in PE and sport.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

The quality of teaching is good overall.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and convey this with enthusiasm to students. The majority of lessons are lively and engaging and introduce a variety of activities which are well-matched to students' needs. In the most successful lessons, skilful questioning is used consistently to prompt students to reflect thoughtfully on their learning. Relationships between students and staff are very strong.
- Students have good awareness of their National Curriculum levels of attainment and how to improve. Peer and self-assessment opportunities are developing well with evaluating and improving being strong features of many lessons. For example in Year 8 rugby and dance lessons. However the use of information to support continuity of learning between Key Stage 2 to 3 and assessment data to support achievement and maximise student potential is not well established.
- The pace of learning is consistently good and students' interest and engagement is well-sustained throughout lessons.
- Feedback to students is variable. Although some good examples were observed in practical lessons and in work folders to enable students to improve, this is inconsistent in quality.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good, with very good extra curricular opportunities.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum meets the government target of two hours of PE and school sport per week. However this is not true for students in Key Stage 4 except those taking accreditation courses. Participation in lessons and extra-curricular activities is good.
- The planned curriculum at Key Stage 3 is traditional with most emphasis on team games. Students have better and more opportunities to study individual activities during Key Stage 4, which students appreciate. The difference in curriculum opportunities leads to some discontinuity of learning.
- Students have well planned opportunities to experience a range of roles in lessons, for example as coach, observer and umpire. They work well in pairs, groups and independently. Students have developing opportunities to use ICT in their lessons to stimulate ideas, observe expertise and increasing to video their own work for evaluation and improvement of their own performance.
- The range of extra curricular opportunities and inter school competition are very good.
- The faculty have appropriately identified increasing competitions in school plus opportunities and challenge for gifted and talented students, including during lessons, as areas for development.

Leadership and management of PE

Leadership and management of PE are good.

- The head of faculty has good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject. Identification of underachievement led to appropriate changes of courses at both Key Stage 4 and sixth form. He has good understanding of challenging high achieving students and is appropriately exploring the introduction of a diploma course.
- The subject action plan appropriately reflects whole school initiatives and priorities for the development of PE although not enough emphasis is placed on improving the progress that students make in their learning.
- The faculty has successfully revised schemes of work and is piloting a new assessment, tracking and predictions system. Good emphasis is placed on the assessment of the four strands of PE National Curriculum. Strategies to reflect changes in school lesson times are also being piloted. However it is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives on pupils learning.

- Monitoring, evaluation and challenge of the faculty work is robust. There is some understanding of judging the impact of initiatives on students' learning although this is not consistent.
- Students currently have limited opportunities to formally input to the development of PE and school sport in the school. However this is being appropriately developed via the introduction of a sports council.

Subject issue - Impact of the PESSCL programme

- The school sports coordinator has been influential in the development of the faculty since they joined the partnership three years ago. He is used very effectively to support delivery of accreditation courses in PE. Improvements include the flexibility of the curriculum at Key Stage 4, increased extra curricular opportunities, facilitation of Step into Sport and Top Link festivals and funding to improve resources. Good focus has been placed on the development of provision for gifted and talented students.
- Teachers in the faculty discuss and use the PESSCL survey results well to agree areas for development. Although the 10 high quality outcomes are displayed in prominent positions in the changing rooms and examination classrooms, limited reference or use is made of them during lessons.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Students with learning difficulties are fully included into lessons, are well supported by teaching assistants and make the same progress as others in the school.
- Students are set by ability in Key Stage 3 and the majority lessons have work that is well matched to the ability of students. Occasionally there is not enough challenge for high achievers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve the use of information to support continuity of learning between Key Stage 2 to 3, and assessment data to support achievement and maximise student potential
- improve written feedback to students to a consistently good level, so that students taking accreditation courses are clear about how to improve their work further.

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

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector