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Dear Mrs Armytage

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Physical Education and English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Philip Jarrett, HMI on 13 and 14 June 2007 to look at work in physical education (PE) and English.

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. I also looked at PE facilities and sampled the schools' work with partner primary schools.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made for English included: discussions with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, review of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

Physical Education

The overall effectiveness of physical education was judged outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average and pupils make good progress overall.

- Standards attained by the end of Key Stage 3 are well above average, with 97% of students reaching Level 5 or above. This compares very favourably with the national average of 76%. Overall, boys and girls attain equally well. From a low starting point, students make rapid progress. A number of the higher attaining students in Year 9 are on a fast track GCSE course, which will see them take the exam a year early.
- Standards at Key Stage 4 are broadly satisfactory. The majority of students in core PE, GCSE PE and the BTEC course are reaching expected levels and make satisfactory progress. However, standards attained by girls in GCSE PE have been lower than those of boys.
- Students are successful in gaining a range of PE related qualifications including umpiring, coaching, officiating and leadership awards. In addition, they acquire a first aid qualification.
- Very good relationships exist between the students and staff and this contributes to an extremely positive learning environment. The excellent promotion of key skills is improving students' leadership and independent working skills, and increasing their confidence and self-esteem. Attendance, behaviour and attitudes, participation and enjoyment rates are also high.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with outstanding elements.

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge is used exceptionally well to guide and support students' learning. Teaching is particularly effective at Key Stage 3.
- Teachers' planning, organisation, deployment of available resources and behaviour management is consistently good. Teachers use questioning techniques very effectively to develop, and consolidate students' knowledge and understanding. A purposeful and very professional learning climate, with an emphasis on high standards and high expectations, underpins the most successful teaching and learning.
- A wide range of learning approaches is used to stimulate and engage students, including progressively challenging tasks to stretch all students' learning and build their self-confidence.
- Assessment practice is good with some exemplary features, including the involvement of students in regular assessments of progress and target setting.
- Frequent praise and feedback on how well students are progressing towards their targets, and the good opportunities for peer and self-evaluation helps them to critically evaluate their own and others performances.

- The department assess all Key Stage 4 students. This is good practice and enables progress to be tracked from the end of Key Stage 3.
- There are missed opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to enrich learning and further develop students' observation and analysis skills. On occasion students were given insufficient time to the practice and refine their skills.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- Curricular provision is excellent, with National Curriculum requirements exceeded. Planning is excellent and all students benefit from a 'foundation stage' before selecting a particular development pathway, based around aesthetic and games programmes of study. This innovative programme ensures that provision meets the specific needs and interests of students.
- The department has substantially expanded provision to provide a very broad range of activities and experiences and a good balance of traditional games and more aesthetic activities such as dance, gymnastics and swimming.
- Students in Key Stage 4 benefit from leadership accreditation, as well as coaching, officiating and first aid courses. In collaboration with a local sixth form college, Year 11 students experience A level PE. The school also offer the BTEC first diploma in sport. This provides students with a good blend of academic and vocational routes. As the school has recognised, the GCSE specification used in the past has been unsuitable for girls in this school's context, and this contributed to their lower achievement.
- There is an excellent range of additional activities for students. The use of teachers and outside coaches along with the school's involvement in the school sports partnership is enriching provision. Participation rates are high and provision caters for students of all abilities. The good links that exist with local clubs and outside organisations provide a development pathway for more talented performers.
- Although there are weaknesses in on site accommodation, the school takes advantage of off site facilities such as a swimming pool and local all weather pitch. There is sufficient equipment to support the curriculum provided. Drainage of the school field is an issue and it means that it is out of action for large periods in poor weather.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management in PE is outstanding.

- The director of sport is a highly effective leader; supported by a strong and very talented departmental team, she is systematically implementing her six-year improvement plan for the subject.

- Very good systems and structures ensure the department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Good arrangements exist for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision and these inform action planning.
- Good procedures exist for the induction of new staff and support of trainee teachers. All staff have completed professional development linked to the department and whole school priorities for improvement. The school sport coordinator is very effective in his role, and links with feeder schools are stronger as a result.
- PE is a lead subject within the school and shares best practice in a number of areas. For example, the house system introduced by PE for sport has become a whole school vehicle to promote good attendance and behaviour.

Subject issue – Continuity of learning between Key Stages

Transition arrangements are satisfactory in PE.

- There is increasingly effective liaison between the department and the main feeder schools, whose experiences of PE have widened because of the sports partnership arrangements. This does not extend to sharing transfer information, but does include on-site transition days, department staff teaching in partner schools and organising PE specific training for primary teachers.
- There are effective plans to align assessment practice and schemes of work to promote better continuity and progression, but this is not in place yet. Good arrangements exist to promote continuity between Key Stages 3 and 4.

Inclusion

The schools arrangements to promote inclusion through PE are good.

- The innovative curriculum promotes good inclusion, as do teachers approaches to planning and the learning approaches they adopt. A pilot scheme to reengage disaffected students using PE to improve their behaviour and attendance has had some success.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- obtaining assessment data from partner primary schools and/or conducting an initial base line assessment of students when they transfer to the school
- evaluating the new GCSE option to ensure that it is promoting high achievement by girls
- making wider use of ICT to enrich learning
- the use of evaluative marking further to support students' progress.

English

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are below average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

- Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average as measured by national tests. However, many pupils do not have secure levels of literacy and struggle with significant aspects of communication.
- Despite a broadly rising trend over recent years, standards in English remain below average at the end of both key stages.
- Most pupils are entered for GCSE English Literature and results tend to be better than in English.
- Contextual value added data shows that achievement in English is variable but broadly satisfactory. Progress is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Nevertheless, the school acknowledges that standards need to be higher. In particular, there is a significant gap between the performance of girls and boys in English and some of the more able pupils do not achieve as highly as expected.

Quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory.

- There have been significant changes to staffing in English in recent years. At present, only one member of the department has more than two years' experience.
- Teaching observed was broadly satisfactory but with some elements that were good. A problem for teachers is that many pupils do not have well established learning skills and some lack self-motivation.
- Teachers form good relationships with pupils and enjoy working with them. Lessons are well planned and teachers show good awareness of pupils' individual needs, especially those with learning difficulties. Lessons are well structured with some effective starter activities and all teachers seek to make use of pupil self-assessment.
- However, learning objectives are not always clear enough and some teachers observed did not manage discussion effectively. Several lessons would have been improved by teacher modelling of writing; this would have clarified expectations and given pupils much needed guidance on aspects such as punctuation, grammar and sentence construction.
- Younger pupils mostly enjoy lessons in English. Older ones are less positive and not always fully engaged. Where lessons are lively and pupils feel fully involved, they respond well. Where the approach to the lesson is more didactic, pupils soon get bored.

- There are some good features to assessment in English. Much of the marking is detailed and supportive. The department assesses pupils' progress systematically and records performance through its Progress in English books.
- Despite this, pupils are unclear about how to improve their work. The assessment information is not currently used to identify the next small steps in learning for pupils. In addition, teachers are not all secure when assessing or levelling work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- At Key Stage 4, most pupils follow two courses in English and English Literature. Media Studies is available as an option and this has a positive impact on English for younger pupils. Drama is not currently provided as an examination course.
- The department has a clear plan for English at Key Stage 3 featuring some interesting units, including an innovative transition unit in Year 7.
- However, the curriculum narrows as pupils move into Year 9 and teachers begin to prepare them for the national tests. The department is clearly under pressure to raise standards. As a result, there is an intense focus in Year 9 and through GCSE on teaching test and examination skills. Pupils need to be fully prepared for the tests but the impact on pupils' motivation suggests that the department should review the balance of its provision. The department should consider ways of improving pupils' motivation and engagement in learning.
- The response by pupils in some lessons, and their comments to me in discussion, suggests that the curriculum does not at present fully meet the needs of all pupils.
- Enrichment activities include a drama club and theatre visits. The department also offers good academic support for pupils through after school and holiday clubs, together with individual tuition.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- The head of department has managed significant staffing changes well. New teachers have been well supported and there is a positive ethos in the department with good, collaborative team work. Two recently qualified teachers are taking responsibility for areas of the department's work and approach this with enthusiasm. As a result, there is a good capacity for improvement.
- The head of department is an effective classroom teacher. He has strong views which should help the new team to develop a clear sense of direction. The departmental improvement plan identifies well chosen

areas for improvement although it currently lacks clear enough links to improvements in pupils' achievement.

- The department collects performance data. This now needs to be used more systematically to analyse trends in pupils' achievement and to identify curricular targets for individual pupils. The new system in place, including the use of the Assessing Pupils' Progress materials, should help to track progress more effectively.
- Monitoring and evaluation are thorough, giving the head of department regular opportunities to observe classroom teaching and to review work in books.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is satisfactory.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about poetry and use a range of stimuli in lessons, including pictures and ICT presentations. Some of the poetry teaching observed was very good.
- Despite this, poetry has a very minor place in the English curriculum at Key Stage 3. As a result, pupils have a very limited knowledge of poets and poetry.
- Younger pupils are positive about poetry and remember lessons in primary schools with affection. Many older pupils express very negative attitudes about poetry and do not enjoy lessons. Teachers acknowledge the difficulties of teaching the quantity of poems set in the examination in ways that will enthuse pupils.
- Pupils are encouraged to write poems for competitions and as a result, many have had their work published in external anthologies. Despite this, pupils have too few opportunities to write poems in lessons.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- The school has some very good intervention programmes in place for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties. This includes the Year 7 "School within a school" initiative, the programme for disaffected pupils in Years 9-11, some paired reading projects and provision for targeted groups of borderline pupils in English in both key stages. However, most of these initiatives are too recent to evaluate their impact on standards and achievement.
- Some pupils do not achieve as well as they should in English as the contextual value added data shows.
- The curriculum does not currently meet the needs of all pupils, as shown by the negative attitudes of some, mentioned earlier.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising levels of achievement for pupils in English
- reviewing the curriculum to ensure that teaching meets pupils' needs, leading to a more positive response in lessons
- analysing performance data better to identify trends in achievement and to provide pupils with clearer guidance on ways of improving their work
- enhancing the role of poetry in the curriculum at Key Stage 3.

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

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

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector