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Mr Richard Schofield
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Dear Mr Schofield

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22-23 May 2007, to look at your school's curriculum and how innovation contributes to standards and achievement. The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting.

Context

Redbridge is an over-subscribed school set in an area of considerable social deprivation. The school has an innovative approach to the curriculum and has introduced a range of different strategies. Amongst these is the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) 'Opening Minds' (OM) scheme, used with Year 7 classes. All subjects, except the core subjects, technology and Physical Education (PE), are delivered through a competence-based approach. Another innovation, which has developed through the school's sports specialist status, is 'Routeways'. This approach analyses preferred PE learning styles into four categories and lessons are then planned to match these different styles.

The overall effectiveness of the curriculum, in terms of meeting a wide range of learning needs, is outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Students start school with very low levels of attainment overall and make outstanding progress so that, by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4, their overall standards have improved to just below national levels. Students make slightly better progress in English than in mathematics. Progress in Key Stage 3 is good and standards improve. Rates of progress are better in Key Stage 4.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities also make good progress and thrive in the supportive environment of the school.

Personal development and well being

Students are very positive about their school and speak highly of the support they receive from the staff. They behave extremely well and enjoy taking part in all the school has to offer.

The OM teaching in Year 7 is well received and popular; students are clear about the benefits gained from this approach. They feel comfortable with teaching styles that mirror those used in their junior schools and appreciate how this eases their transition to the 'big school'. They value their extended contact with one teacher.

'Routeways' is also well liked. Students feel they learn in a way which is most suitable for them and they gain confidence from working alongside others with similar learning styles. This approach improves their motivation. Those who were not necessarily keen on sporting activities at first are now happy to be involved.

Quality of provision

The teachers involved in these learning innovations are very enthusiastic and keen to develop the new strategies required. They are flexible in approach, appreciating the importance of differentiated teaching methods to support individual learning needs. They value the improved relationships with their students which grow from this.

Teachers have put a great deal of effort into planning for and teaching the four different learning approaches used in 'Routeways'. The OM sessions are also well planned to cover subjects in an integrated way that overlaps with and smoothes the transition from primary schools. Teachers are well trained and able to cope with the different subject areas. Lessons include many opportunities for students to develop key skills and learning competencies. Students are assessed against the OM competencies and national curriculum levels in core subjects. This approach is yet to be as well established in other subject areas.

The innovations are well integrated into all school activities. There is considerable and successful overlap with other initiatives such as 'Creative Partnerships', producing worthwhile and positive outcomes for the students. The school is now considering ways of developing these innovations further and strengthening their impact in other years.

The school knows what is needed to support its students and cares very well for them. High expectations, combined with strong guidance and support, ensure that students make exceptionally good progress.

Leadership and Management of the curriculum

The different aspects of curriculum innovation have been expertly and enthusiastically led. Senior managers have a realistic view of the success and impact of these innovative practices and are flexible in adapting to change. As a result, the curriculum model is continually evolving and adapting to the changing needs of students. The school successfully runs several different initiatives that are well integrated into overall curriculum provision.

Inclusion

Redbridge is an inclusive school where students are happy and achieve well. The school gives good support to vulnerable students. The varied use of curriculum time enables students of all abilities to focus on and complete their work.

Areas for development, which we discussed the need to:

- strengthen the match between the OM competency and National Curriculum tracking systems in foundation subjects
- smooth the transition between the Year 7 OM units and the non-OM lessons in Year 8
- consider extending the 'Routeways' techniques and methodologies to other subject areas to enhance learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the curriculum 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

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector