

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



13 June 2007

Mr Ray Priest
Principal
The City Academy Bristol
Russell Town Avenue
Bristol
BS5 9JH

Dear Mr Priest

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21-22 May 2007. At the end of the visit I fed back my conclusions and this letter confirms those findings.

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 are 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and visits to some lessons; seeing the school at work.

Context and background

The City Academy Bristol opened as an academy in 2003. The school is also a specialist sports college. There are many examples of innovative curriculum development across the school, although the inspection focused particularly on Key Stage 3 developments. Students in Year 7 currently spend the equivalent of one day per week on 'Project 7', which aims to help students develop the skills needed to become effective learners. These skills include perseverance, teamwork and planning. The school has also developed an innovative business education programme in a number of areas, including finance and enterprise. In music, the school is currently developing a new approach to learning based on the Musical Futures programme.

Achievement and standards and personal development

Students enter the school with standards that are exceptionally low. They make outstanding progress during Key Stage 3. National results at the end of this stage have risen steadily over the past three years, although they are below national averages. Although GCSE results are also below national averages, students make excellent progress during Key Stage 4. Students are enthusiastic, enjoy learning and are proud of their school. They behave well in lessons and respond positively to the school's innovative approach to teaching, learning and the curriculum.

The Project 7 lessons make a very strong contribution to students' personal development. They are able to articulate very clearly the reasons for doing Project 7 and the ways in which it is helping them to become better learners. They learn to be independent, work in pairs, groups and as part of the whole class. They take on different roles in groups and learn how to negotiate with other students about the best way to accomplish a task. They learn how to make informed choices about how to complete work in the extended time available. Students also appreciate the opportunities that Project 7 provides for them to lead lessons. Both the student leaders and others in the class respond very well to these opportunities.

Teaching, learning and the curriculum

The teaching and learning observed during the inspection was all at least good. Staff teaching the Project 7 curriculum volunteered to work on the programme and they are extremely committed to its success. They have worked hard to produce materials and resources for the course, although opportunities to work together on planning have been rather limited this year. Many of the materials produced to support Project 7 are excellent, although the quality of some modules is not quite as high. The team realises this and there are already plans in place to redevelop the course for next year. Students enjoy Project 7 lessons and are very well engaged with their work. It is already making a strong contribution to the development of their skills and is helping them to learn more effectively in other subjects.

Innovation in other areas of the curriculum is also having a positive impact on students' learning. For example, Year 9 students in music appreciate the Musical Futures approach as it gives them more responsibility and control over their learning. As a result, they produce work of a very high quality. The school's innovative work in business education is helping students to gain a truly authentic experience of the business world. They find this highly motivating and it makes an excellent contribution to their employability. The school's work as a sports college supports many aspects of curriculum development, both in the specialist subject and across the school.

Leadership and management of the curriculum

Curriculum innovation has been very well led. You have set a strong and clear direction for development. The focus in the first three years of the academy was on establishing good teaching and learning and improving results. As this has now been achieved, you have rightly judged that the school can now support further curriculum innovation and development.

The senior and middle leaders form an extremely strong team. The high quality of discussion and planning about the curriculum and the next steps in its development provide considerable capacity for further, successful innovation. Project 7 is being very well led by its coordinator, with effective support from other members of the team; a great deal has been achieved in a short time.

Inclusion

This is a very inclusive school. All groups of students enjoy and achieve well. Staff are highly committed to meeting the needs of all students.

Overall

Strengths:

- The curriculum innovation is underpinned by a very clear vision.
- Teachers are committed to the value of curriculum innovation.
- The impact of the Project 7 innovation on the skills of Year 7 students is already significant: there is already clear evidence of this in students' learning in other subjects.
- Students understand the reasons for the Project 7 curriculum innovation and can clearly articulate the contribution that it is making to their ability to learn effectively.

Issues for consideration:

- Further development is needed in Project 7 to support the assessment and progression of students' skills and competencies for learning.
- More work needs to be done to help staff not involved in Project 7 to become more familiar with the methodology and approach.
- Further planning is needed to develop the positive aspects of the Project 7 approach in other years and across curriculum areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools