

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



23 May 2007

Mr Derek Wise
Headteacher
Cramlington Community High School
Highburn
Cramlington
Northumberland
NE23 6BN

Dear Mr Wise

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 21-22 May 2007 to look at your school's curriculum and how it contributes to standards and achievement, teaching and learning and inclusion.

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. Feedback letters are published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements includes interviews with staff, meetings with students, lesson observations and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

Your school exemplifies outstanding curriculum planning and provision which strongly support highly effective teaching and an active, reflective and purposeful style of learning.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well above average and have been consistently so over a period of significant curriculum innovation at the school. Students make very good progress. Specialist status in science and vocational education and well targeted investment in ICT resources and expertise have had a positive impact on standards and achievement in each year group. Development of online resources and ICT support are enabling students continually to evidence, evaluate and enhance their progress.

Teaching and learning

The school's focus on 'Learning 2 Learn' has had a very positive impact on teaching and learning, which are never less than good and often outstanding. Time devoted each week to professional development complements the school's strong tradition of sharing ideas and skills, actively investigating innovation and best practice both locally and internationally, and investing in relevant technology. Teachers are encouraged to be innovative, helped by creative ICT expertise. Opportunities to focus on a particular project or topic for an extended period of time allow teachers and students to explore issues in depth, to reflect and evaluate, to move through a variety of activities and approaches and to have the satisfaction of reaching a clear outcome. Students build up subject knowledge while acquiring skills such as team-building, investigation, practical problem-solving, presentation and versatile ICT competences. They value opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning, to make choices about avenues to explore and techniques to apply within a teacher-set framework. Independent learning is an outstanding strength of the school.

Quality of curriculum

The structure and substance of the curriculum are outstanding. New elements have been brought in by reconfiguring time allocations, and have been given spaces arranged to match their demands and potential: for example, large teaching rooms with ICT facilities, break-out areas, a range of furnishings and expansive display space. The foundation of this curriculum is 'Learning 2 Learn' - a course run in Year 9 and given as much time and status as core subjects. The material used to stimulate investigation, negotiation, evaluation and presentation encompasses many aspects of citizenship but students tend not to see these as intrinsically worthwhile, which is an opportunity missed. Resources for ICT, including three full-time and highly creative web designers, encourage continual updating and refreshing of curriculum content and build bridges between the school and the wider world. In the sixth form, 20% of school time is devoted to well-resourced independent learning, which students value and use well to support their curriculum subjects. Reconfigurations of time allow for cross-curricular, trans-disciplinary projects in all years. These encourage students to make productive, inventive connections between subjects.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent, combining visionary zeal with confident pragmatism. Strong direction from the you and your strategic team, focusing on the quality of learning rather than on chasing examination results, gives coherence to an extensive network of delegated responsibilities. Continuity of leadership has been a significant factor in the school's successful development. Policies and innovation all grow from the shared conviction that the curriculum in its broadest sense needs to be dynamic and to support

good, personalised learning for students of disparate abilities, aspirations and learning styles, and to foster independence and flexibility. Needs have been identified through:

- consultation with students, parents or carers, staff, local businesses;
- investigation of good practice elsewhere as a benchmark;
- regular self-evaluation; and
- external assessments.

Success is tracked through:

- examination results;
- internal monitoring of teaching and learning;
- feedback from staff, students, parents and the local community;
- external evaluation – such as Ofsted; and
- use of ICT, including the newly-introduced student e-portfolios.

These elements are clearly linked to the school's Development and Transformation Plan.

Inclusion

The stress on personalised learning, with students being supported as they discover their best learning strategies and pathways, enables the school to be inclusive. Students with very different abilities, and some with a range of disabilities and difficulties, have access to all opportunities and are helped to progress as well as their peers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that valuable opportunities to engage with citizenship issues in a cohesive and enduring way, rather than as a means to a different end, are fully exploited.

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

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector