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Dear Mr Appleton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – physical education and religious education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 14 and 15 June 2007 to look at work in physical education (PE) and religious education (RE).

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of PE the visit had a particular focus on the continuity of learning between key stages, particularly Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. In the case of RE, the focus was on the contribution of the subject to the promotion of community cohesion.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons in both RE and PE.

Physical education

The overall effectiveness of PE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in PE is good at both key stages.

- The department has an accurate view of standards and the progress students make in the subject. Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are above average overall. Standards in GCSE PE have been below average but early indications show that remedial work put in place to tackle underachievement in theory aspects is having a positive impact.
- Students make at least good progress during Key Stage 3 and on accreditation courses because of good teaching. The department is starting to make use of information on students' prior learning when they enter the school in Year 7.
- The specialist sports status has had a positive impact on the quality of provision. It has ensured a more focused approach to improving standards and achievement and is having a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning.
- Very good emphasis is placed on using the four strands of the PE programme of study both in planning documentation and delivery. Students are given excellent opportunities to develop their skills when evaluating their own and others' work to bring about improvement. They also have a well developed understanding of the importance of leading healthy lifestyles.
- Students have very good opportunities for personal development in PE. Their voice is not only sought through questionnaires but their suggestions are listened to and acted upon, for example in bringing about changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum and extra curricular opportunities. Students feel very involved in decision making for improving PE provision. Sport and house captain roles are well conceived and students relish the opportunities to take responsibility for peer activities; they are extremely good ambassadors for PE and sport in the partner primary schools.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- Teachers have outstanding subject knowledge that they use effectively to support students' learning. A large range of strategies is implemented to stimulate and motivate students in lessons. Intervention with individuals and groups is timely and enables students to make good progress. Marking of written work is consistent across the department and includes helpful comments to improve further.
- Teachers are particularly skilled at using question and answer techniques to engage all students with verbal input into lessons, to challenge their thinking and to help them understand the next steps in their own learning. Students are given good opportunities to acquire new knowledge and to develop understanding of difficult concepts such as learning about muscle groups and their effects on different sporting activities in Year 8.

- Staff are starting to incorporate the use of movement analysis with a commercial video package; students find this an exciting way to learn and it motivates them to want to improve their performances.
- The new assessment, tracking and target setting procedures are robust. Even though this work is embryonic, it is already having a positive impact with students understanding the next steps in their learning to support improvement. However, information is not easily accessed to track progress from the starting points in Year 7. The plans to extend the current system are well conceived.
- The department has good procedures to identify students who are underachieving and appropriate action is taken as a result.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with outstanding features.

- The curriculum has been successfully reviewed to match the needs and interests of students at the school better. Key Stage 3 is now planned to include longer blocks of work that enable in-depth study of an activity. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
- The Key Stage 4 core curriculum has, innovatively, four strands of choice including good breadth of aesthetic, non competitive, leading and coaching and high level performance. Students appreciate that these changes enable them to find activities they will continue to pursue as lifelong participants.
- Some personalisation of programmes is starting to be offered for GCSE PE students especially for the practical assessment activity.
- Students have outstanding opportunities to undertake accreditation courses and leadership opportunities in PE, sport and dance. The GCSE accelerated groups in Year 9 enable talented students to achieve success early. Young leaders are recognised in Year 8 through their work with Year 7 students and junior sports leaders in primary partner schools.
- The department has a full and varied enrichment programme that most students attend. They have good plans to extend the programme to include alternative activities that will appeal to wider groups of students.
- Although students in Key Stage 3 and those taking accreditation courses receive two hours of curriculum PE, core Key Stage 4 students only receive three hours each fortnight which is below the government target.

Leadership and management of PE

The leadership and management in PE are good overall.

- Senior managers have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the PE department based on secure monitoring and

evaluation procedures, especially the full department reviews. Department action plans are comprehensive and prioritised well to support development of the subject and extend the impact of the specialist sports status. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

- The devolved leadership model is helping to drive initiatives. Managers and key stage coordinators of PE have a very clear vision for development in their areas of responsibility and drive changes at pace. The recently introduced programme of meetings to share successes, to decide priorities for the development of the specialist status, and to forge a common purpose is already having a positive impact in promoting professional dialogue, debate and challenge within the department.
- Schemes of work are supportive and pay good attention to the four strands of the PE programme of study and the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes.
- The use of assessment data is an area for improvement that the school had already identified.

Continuity of learning between key stages

- The school has extremely good and long established links with partner primary schools to support transition.
- The common scheme of work introduced in partner primary schools is very helpful in ensuring consistency in teaching and learning opportunities for all Key Stage 2 pupils. Teachers from both primary and secondary phases feel this has helped children to be more prepared for the transition to Key Stage 3, has ensured better continuity of learning, and has enabled them to make at least good progress. The school make good use of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority recommended core tasks to support transition further.
- The school sports partnership has established a good system for moderating judgements on levels of attainment in PE between staff from Key Stage 2 and 3. However, this is not formally recorded with information gained from core tasks to support tracking of students' progress throughout the school from their starting point in Year 7.
- Students are very well prepared for the transition between Key Stage 3 and GCSE PE.

Inclusion

- All pupils are included in PE lessons. No difference was observed in the progress and attainment between boys and girls although girls pay more attention to their written work in the GCSE PE classes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the assessment, tracking and target setting procedures so that students progress can be more easily tracked from entry in Year 7 to the end of each key stages
- considering more personalisation of programmes during core Key Stage 4 PE to meet the needs and interests of even more students.

Religious education

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be satisfactory and improving with some good features.

Achievement and standards

Standards in RE are broadly average and student achievement, while variable, is broadly satisfactory and, in some cases, good or better.

- Around 80 students have chosen to enter the GCSE short course this year; this represents one of the key improvements in the subject since the last inspection. Provisional assessments indicate that the students are reaching high standards and are likely to achieve in line with their overall ability. Given the legacy of unsatisfactory provision which these students experienced at Key Stage 3 this represents good overall achievement at Key Stage 4.
- The available data on student performance in Year 10 and throughout Key Stage 3 are unreliable. The inspection evidence indicates that achievement is erratic reflecting some of the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision.
- The progress in RE of the students following the integrated studies programme in Year 7 is outstanding. The interlinking of RE with the wider competency curriculum is proving highly effective and, relative to their ability, the students develop an impressive capacity to interrogate, interpret and respond to religious material.
- Elsewhere achievement is very uneven. In some classes, where they receive specialist teaching, student progress is usually good. In some of the lessons taught by non-specialists, students make good progress; but, in the case of average and more able students, this is not always sustained across sequences of lessons; achievement over time is therefore satisfactory rather than good. Some timetabling arrangements and aspects of the structure of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 are also factors inhibiting higher achievement.
- Where student achievement is good they demonstrate a confident ability to deploy higher order thinking skills in their study of religion. Much of the work extends their ability to investigate, analyse and interpret religion.
- The personal development of students in the context of RE is often good and, on occasions, outstanding. The enthusiasm and interest

shown towards RE by the students following the Year 7 integrated studies programme is very exciting. Many students, particularly those opting to take the GCSE exam, are very engaged by the subject and rise to the challenge of taking responsibility for their learning and participating in debate about philosophical and ethical issues. Most students take the subject seriously and value the opportunity it provides to develop their understanding of diversity.

- Occasionally, the attitudes of a small minority of students at Key Stage 4 can impact negatively on their progress.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory but some is good or outstanding.

- The major reason for the variable quality of the teaching is the use of a wide range of non-specialists in RE. Over half of lessons in the subject are currently taught by non-specialists. A new appointment for September 2007 will resolve this problem.
- There is some outstanding practice in the teaching of RE by non-specialists in the Year 7 integrated studies programme. Very imaginative planning, careful preparation and the skilful interlinking of work developing literacy, oracy and key skills with RE learning is resulting in some high quality group work, discussion, and oral presentation by the students.
- Elsewhere, particularly but not exclusively where lessons are taught by the subject specialist, a range of challenging teaching and learning strategies are deployed. Increasingly, effective use is being made of the distinctive and innovative structure of learning in the locally agreed syllabus and this is helping to raise achievement. Non-specialists are finding this model of teaching and learning difficult to apply and, for this reason, learning across a sequence of lessons can lack challenge and structure.
- In the best lessons very high expectations and the skilful management of learning ensure students have a clear understanding of the purpose of their tasks and consolidate and extend their learning well.
- Work in RE is usually marked regularly and some good use is beginning to be made of levels in assessment. Where the teacher is a specialist, students receive good feedback on their progress and clear pointers for improvement. Some well-designed, levelled assessment tasks are being introduced in Key Stage 3. Good use is being made of peer marking, and, in the best contexts, students have a good understanding of how to make progress.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is satisfactory but with some emerging strengths.

- The current provision for RE at Key Stage 4 meets statutory requirements and an increasing number of students are opting to enter for the GCSE examination. Efforts are being made to offer a series of pathways at this key stage. Care needs to be taken to monitor the impact on learning and attitudes of some of the timetabling arrangements for specific groups of Key Stage 4 students who are occasionally withdrawn from RE to undertake other activities. Similarly the impact of the timetabling in Year 8, with students receiving only one lesson of RE per fortnight, should be monitored carefully.
- Some very good progress has been made in the past year to develop the curriculum for Key Stage 3 and embrace the distinctive model of learning of the agreed syllabus. The head of RE is aware of the need to keep these developments under review to ensure, for example, that the momentum of learning is not lost by over-extending the number of cycles of learning within any unit of work.
- The curriculum for RE in the Year 7 integrated studies programme is particularly effective. Paradoxically, this is not yet formally aligned with the Hampshire model of learning although it will not be difficult to achieve this.
- While progress is being made in developing the internal coherence and continuity within individual units of work, more attention needs to be paid to the pattern of both continuity and progression across the overall Key Stage 3 RE curriculum. Currently, weaknesses in this aspect of the provision are contributing to the unevenness in student achievement.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The change in the leadership and management of the subject has been the critical factor in the good improvement made since the last subject inspection. This, together with the appointment of a second subject specialist for September 2007, means the capacity for further improvement is now very good. The subject is well-placed to make a very strong contribution to the wider school priorities of improving and personalising learning.
- The subject self-evaluation is a frank assessment of its strengths and improvement priorities. Very effective use has been made of local authority support to help with the process of monitoring, developing and evaluating the subject.
- The head of subject, who has a clear vision for RE, is providing good leadership in terms of developing the curriculum and the assessment arrangements. She has managed and monitored the complex pattern of non-specialist teaching well although the necessity to provide this support has taken time away from other development priorities.
- Once the department has a more robust set of assessment data available, it will be important to track student progress more closely and analyse patterns of achievement more rigorously.

- Improvements have been made to the subject accommodation since the last inspection. The plan to provide a laptop for use with the data projector in the main teaching room will help to secure more effective use of information and communication technology in RE.

The contribution of RE to the promotion of community cohesion

The subject makes a positive overall contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. The emphasis on making the learning challenging and on encouraging students to develop their critical thinking about religion is contributing to the seriousness with which they take issues of belief, value and diversity. At its best, the teaching engages directly with issues about the place of religion in the contemporary world. There is scope to extend the opportunities to use fieldwork and visitors from the wider community to enrich the students' learning.

Inclusion

Many aspects of the provision for inclusion in RE are good. The progress in RE of the least able in Year 7 is particularly impressive because of the effective inclusion of the subject in the integrated studies programme. The students selecting to be entered for the short course GCSE include a relatively high proportion of boys reflecting the efforts made to secure their interest in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing and, where necessary improving, the pattern of continuity and progression in the Key Stage 3 curriculum
- consolidating the good progress made in implementing the Hampshire agreed syllabus
- extending the use made of fieldwork and visitors in RE
- reviewing the success of the RE component of the integrated studies programme to consider whether to extend this further across the wider ability range
- securing the overall assessment arrangements, and using data more effectively to track student progress and evaluate the overall provision.

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

As we explained in our previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and, in the case of RE, to SACRE and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine
Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspectors