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Mrs A Witheford
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Dear Mrs Witheford

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 – 05 December 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; lesson observations; seeing the school at work. The school has developed its own innovative evaluation strategies that are used to appraise all aspects of the school's work. These are founded on the Ofsted evaluation processes that have been developed into a series of generic criteria applicable to all aspects of the school. In particular the strategies inform development planning at all levels as well as lessons and learning activities outside of the classroom.

The overall effectiveness of the impact of the evaluation strategies on curriculum innovation was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards, and personal development

- Students progress well during their time in school and leave with standards that are well above average.
- GCSE results at 5 A* - C overall and including English and mathematics have risen consistently over the past three years.

- Similarly, achievement is rising as progress improves. The school meets challenging targets consistently, including those set as part of their specialist school status.
- The school's evaluative strategies make a very significant contribution to these improvements in achievement and standards. Because all subject areas use the same analytical methods there is a consistent approach to improving learning that centres on a strong focus on raising attainment.
- This evaluative focus is just as strong in all other aspects of the school's work, including personal development, as the methods used work equally well in those areas that are not well supported by quantitative data. Consequently behaviour and personal development continue to be excellent and pupils are enthusiastic about learning and about their school.

Teaching, learning and the curriculum

- The quality of teaching continues to be strongly influenced by the innovative evaluative strategies. Subject areas use them to draw a clear picture of the current quality of their provision, to identify future needs and to plan for extending and developing their teaching strategies to better meet the needs of the students. Subsequent analysis measures the effectiveness of the new strategies.
- This is a very flexible approach through which different departments can implement alternative classroom practices that are specific to improving performance in their subjects. Teaching is now mostly well considered, interesting, engaging and thoroughly evaluated.
- The curriculum is well organised and again influenced by outcomes of the evaluative planning. This allows for very good use to be made of individual teachers' strengths and expertise as well as the introduction and adaptation of innovative teaching strategies. A good example of this is being used in English where the recently introduced 'language pyramid' is making a significant difference to students' textual analysis skills.
- The evaluative strategies are also applied to activities outside of the classroom. This is carried out in the same way as activities within the classroom and make a similar contribution to students learning experiences. For example the impact of involvement in a poetry competition was thoroughly analysed and the outcomes used to plan for improvements in future participation.

Leadership and management of the curriculum

- Leadership of this innovation is excellent. There is a clear vision for future development through a sensible and disciplined approach that involves all staff through good communications and consultation. As a result there is excellent teamwork throughout the school and clear

understanding of the rationale for using and developing the evaluation strategies.

- These are complex systems that may, at first glance, appear hard to use. However, clear and thorough induction into the processes as well as involvement in their development means that staff are very familiar with the systems and find they are versatile enough to be used in a variety of scenarios.
- The senior management has worked hard to ensure that these evaluation strategies are used effectively in all aspects of the school's work. They are driven by a strong focus on each student achieving as well as they can that also helps them to become confident learners, with excellent attitudes to learning and to school.

Inclusion

- Lessons observed during the inspection demonstrated effective inclusion of all learners. The performance of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is also thoroughly analysed and they achieve well.

Issues for consideration which we discussed included:

- raising standards in mathematics through implementing the initiatives and changes indicated through the evaluation strategies.

I do hope you find these comments useful.

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 of Schools