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Mrs Marsha Elms
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Elms

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Physical Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 and 10 January to look at work in physical education (PE). As outlined in my initial letter, I was looking at key areas of the subject.

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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of physical education was judged to be good with outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards are well above expectations by the end of Key Stage 3 and have been consistently well above average in GCSE PE and A level for the last two years. There have been 100% pass rates at the highest grades of A* and A in GCSE for the last two years. The numbers of girls who opt to take accredited PE courses are still relatively low.
- All girls make outstanding progress in PE from their varied starting points because of the quality of teaching and their own commitment to succeed. Teachers are skilled at ensuring all students have early opportunities to complete tasks and activities they have not covered at primary schools.

- Few girls have learning difficulties, but those that do are identified early; staff know and support them well and consequently they make the same progress as others in the school.
- Higher attaining students are challenged extremely well in most lessons with work that is clearly differentiated to stretch their independent thinking and increase the opportunities to find their own solutions to tasks.
- Girls have very good opportunities to develop their use of selecting and applying skills in a broad range of activities. They have particularly well developed knowledge and understanding of using observation to evaluate each others' work and give comprehensive feedback on how to improve it further. The vast majority of girls have very well-developed understanding of leading a healthy lifestyle because of the school's commitment to and achievement of the Healthy Schools Gold Award.
- Good opportunities are available for personal development through PE particularly for sixth formers. For example, when using skills from their community leadership award with primary pupils in gymnastics and volleyball, or with Key Stage 3 students when leading and coaching in club activities. Other girls take responsibility for independent warm up sessions and good opportunities were available for peer teaching in Year 7 swimming.
- All girls feel able to feed back their views on PE provision. Changes have been made as a result, such as the introduction of more extracurricular clubs.
- All girls demonstrate very good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning in PE lessons; they work diligently to complete tasks. Very good relationships exist between staff and students. Co-operation and peer support is exemplary. Girls all say how much they enjoy PE.
- Good attention is given to the outcomes of Every Child Matters, especially being healthy, working safely and making a positive contribution.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

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

- All teachers have good subject knowledge that they use extremely well to challenge students' learning. Staff have consistently high expectations of both physical and verbal input to lessons, including the introduction of challenging PE terminology in Year 7 netball.
- Most teachers are outstanding at planning work to meet the needs of different abilities, especially high attaining girls.
- Teachers use a very good range of methods to engage students. Question and answer techniques are a particular strength to stretch girls' knowledge and to help them understand links between different activities. Good opportunities are planned for girls to work independently, in pairs and small groups. Girls are given outstanding opportunities to take a variety of roles in lessons.
- Staff are skilled at assessing progress in lessons to enable timely intervention to bring about improvement. Occasionally the pace of

work drops or expectations are not high enough when teacher input is too long or when theory work in accredited courses is not challenging enough.

- Formal assessment using National Curriculum levels of attainment and recording of pupils' progress over time have been introduced in the last year. Consequently, procedures are not embedded or used consistently to enable all girls to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Where it is used well, girls are able to assess their own work and understand the next step in learning.
- Not enough emphasis is given to assessing the four strands of the PE Programme of Study.
- Although Information and Communication Technology has been used to evaluate performances in some gym and dance lessons, this has already been identified as an area for further development.
- Marking of accredited work gives limited detail on what needs to be done to improve work or gain better marks.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the PE curriculum is good.

- The curriculum has very good breadth of study across Key Stage 3. It has improved at Key Stage 4 with greater variety of choice in core PE lessons. The lengths of units of work are relatively short to enable in-depth study of an activity, although study of 12 -14 weeks is being piloted in Year 7 games.
- Units of work are currently written in different formats so do not consistently support the development of skills. Where unit details contain learning outcomes and clearly reflect progression they are better placed to support teaching.
- More opportunities have been made available for accreditation since the introduction of A level PE and the community leadership award for sixth formers. Girls also appreciate the chance to acquire the bronze medallion for lifesaving.
- Personalisation of learning is starting to be introduced into GCSE PE, with girls able to use their external sports of synchronised swimming and fencing for practical assessment. Students who are gifted and talented are supported by time being given for additional coaching, although catch-up programmes for their academic studies are not consistently in place.
- Students in Key Stage 3 have two hours of curriculum PE, but girls in Key Stage 4 have less than this. Although you have good plans in place to increase the time available for curriculum PE in Key Stage 4 from September 2008, for the majority of girls who do not attend extra curricular activities this still falls short of the government target of two hours. The head of department is exploring additional extracurricular activities for this age group.
- Sixth formers have good access to a voluntary physical recreation session and many use the fitness suite at other times of the day.
- A good range of extracurricular activities are available for all age groups, although there is a predominance of games activities and only

about a third of the girls attend clubs and team activities on a regular basis. The fitness sessions held twice a week are particularly well attended and girls say how much they enjoy the inter class and inter school competitions. They also appreciate the opportunity to work with external coaches such as for lacrosse and netball. Other opportunities are available that further enrich the PE programme, for example outdoor and adventurous activity residential visits.

- Good links are made with other subjects where possible, such as during the focus weeks using the schools specialist status of maths and science.

Leadership and management of PE

Leadership and management of PE are outstanding.

- The head of department is outstanding in her leadership of this talented and experience team. She is an exemplary teacher and role model for staff and students. She has introduced a broader range of activities to both the curriculum and extracurricular programmes making the best use of improved facilities on site. Positive changes have been made because of student feedback, especially to the range of extracurricular opportunities.
- The head of department has outstanding knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of provision, based on secure monitoring and evaluation procedures. She has shown determination to bring about improvements. The department work very well as a team and support new initiatives, such as the introduction of more formal assessment procedures. The PE action plan is well focused to bring about further improvements, at pace.
- Very good opportunities are made to share staff expertise and increase subject knowledge, such as team teaching in dance and department training for synchronised swimming. Good practice in writing reports that indicate girls' progress against the four strands of the PE National Curriculum need to be shared more widely.
- Although assessment has only been introduced recently, good opportunities are available to moderate judgements across the department. These are sometimes judged lower than standards observed during the inspection, especially for Year 7. Tracking progress over time is secure in accredited courses and has already been identified as an area for development with other students. PE National Curriculum levels have been adapted well to enable students to assess their own work more thoroughly, although they are not used consistently in lessons by all PE staff.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is a strength of provision. Girls with specific cultural needs are enabled to participate fully in activities. Although a high proportion of black and minority ethnic students are learner swimmers, work is ably planned to ensure they make good progress in this area.

- Gifted and talented athletes are identified early and suitably challenging work is planned to extend them in most lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the length of teaching time for units of work to ensure more in-depth study of an activity
- ensuring consistent use of assessment procedures in all lessons
- placing more emphasis on assessing girls' progress in the four strands of the PE National Curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop physical education 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector