

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 0207 421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Brough
Headteacher
The Friary School
Eastern Avenue
Lichfield
Staffordshire
WS13 7EW

Dear Mr Brough

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Physical Education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 October 2008 to look at work in physical education (PE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on assessing the PE contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) particularly 'being healthy'.

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 impact of the specialist school visual and performing arts and sport status, interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in PE are outstanding.

- By the end of Key Stage 3 standards are higher than the national expectation. This judgement aligns with the schools' own assessment data.
- On the evidence of work seen and results in accredited courses, progress is maintained through Key Stage 4 and standards remain above average. The school has no data on standards for students following the 'core' programme to substantiate this view.

- The trend in results in GCSE PE has been upwards since designation as a specialist school. In 2007 the number of students achieving A* to C grades was above the national average and the school average for all subjects. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.
- Sixty students taking the BTEC vocational course for the first time achieved excellent results.
- Results at AS and A-level are above average and students perform in line with expectations. The number of students from Key Stage 4 opting to study AS PE increased considerably this year.
- Achievement is excellent because at the time of entry to the school standards are broadly in line with the national expectation. Very effective teaching and the commitment by a high percentage of students to participating in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities contribute to the high standards seen.
- Many teams and individuals are very successful at local and county level and some move forward to achieve success at national level.
- Students' knowledge and understanding in various activity areas allows them to lead warm-ups, analyse performance and give helpful feedback to their peers.
- In the work seen, the performance of boys in conditioned games of football and rugby was excellent, as was the creative use of action, rhythmic, dynamic and spatial elements in group dance routines of Year 8 girls. Skill performance and sequence construction was weaker in gymnastics.
- The personal development of students is good. The majority work hard, persevere with tasks and take responsibility when it is given. There is a culture of mutual respect between staff and students which creates the industrious atmosphere that permeates the department. As one student said, "The teachers are great, they are very enthusiastic."

Quality of Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- A number of very effective strategies characterise almost all lessons. They include good links to previous learning, high expectations, clear explanations of what is expected, sharing learning objectives in writing, effective use of demonstrations to identify strengths and weaknesses in performance and questioning that requires students to provide thoughtful responses.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use a range of teaching styles to engage and sustain interest. Lessons are well planned and start promptly. The good balance between time for questioning and demonstrations to deepen understanding and the time for skill repetition leads to the high standards and progress achieved.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given very good support and a small class of poorly motivated girls was managed sensibly and sensitively.

- Apart from in Key Stage 4 core PE, students' progress is assessed and tracked closely. Levels of achievement are shared with students and most have an understanding of what they should do to make further progress.
- Assessment for learning is an important part of all lesson plans. It is used effectively in practical lessons to modify some whole class tasks but not to provide separate or different tasks suitably matched to the wide ability range. In some lessons observed, regardless of performance, all students follow the same set activities.
- In theory lessons teaching is mostly interactive. This is seldom the case in practical activities where students follow the direction for learning set by the teacher. There are too few occasions in these lessons when contributions made by the students themselves are used to shape progress.
- Although teachers make good use of time in the '50 minute' lesson, students say that single lessons are too short by the time they have changed.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The time allocated within the curriculum, coupled with the high levels of participation by students in extra-curricular activities, ensures the school makes a significant contribution towards the government target for the percentage of students participating in five hours of physical activity each week.
- In Key Stage 3 the programme is wider than that typically seen. It includes the opportunity for swimming in each year and a satisfactory balance in the time provided for the various activity areas. However, continuity in learning is fragmented when two different activities are covered in a 'double period'. In Key Stage 4 the opportunity for students to select a curriculum pathway suited to their specific needs is appropriate.
- The department is piloting approaches in Year 7 in line with the greater flexibility offered in the new National Curriculum.
- Extra-curricular provision is outstanding. Inter-school and inter-form fixtures and non-competitive experiences are provided for all ages in a very broad range of activities. Students in the sixth form said they also would like more opportunities to continue with competitions.
- Through the PE School Sport and Young People (PESSYP) strategy, the School Sport Co-ordinator has further increased the range of opportunities available and engaged some older and more reluctant girls. The uptake and support for the leadership programme has been particularly good.
- Off site-trips and expeditions abroad are especially appreciated.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management in PE is outstanding.

- Senior leaders value PE and sport recognising the contribution it makes to overall achievement and personal development.
- The Director of Sport has a very clear vision for the subject which is translated into policies and plans delivered by a capable and committed team. Delegated responsibilities to all teachers and weekly consultation meetings engender a feeling of self-worth and corporate ownership of programmes and the strategies to deliver them.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. It is the close analysis of data and attention to detail that is contributing to year-on-year improvement. Evaluation of the impact of learning outcomes and teaching on learning are good but not subject to the same detailed scrutiny.
- The Director of Sport is justly proud of the improvements achieved in recent years. Accommodation and resources are well used including the use of external coaches to improve teaching and to secure good value for money. There is no sense of complacency.

Subject issue - PE contribution to the outcomes of ECM

PE makes a strong contribution to the outcomes of ECM

- As part of the combined specialism of the school, PE and sport is given high profile and its influence permeates the building. Digital video signage, together with more traditional wall displays in the main communication areas, focus on successes and the wide range of inclusive opportunities provided.
- The enrichment programme ensures there are activities to suit most students' tastes. Additional activities provided through the PESSYP strategy have helped to ensure some students in danger of losing interest, especially girls, stay involved and active. Good examples include clubs for cheerleading, trampolining, climbing and the use of dance mats.
- Students have a regular opportunity to express their views through the Pupil in Focus (PIF) questionnaires. Almost all students in Key Stage 3 say they enjoy the subject, especially the competitions.
- Students following the leadership programme and Step into Sport are involved in practical coaching and volunteering that could provide economic well-being in later life.
- Most students understand the importance of physical activity and diet in a healthy lifestyle. They are aware that they attend a school where PE and sport are given high profile and where being physically active is seen as very important.
- PE makes an important contribution to promoting health and fitness. However, other than in the sixth form, there is no specific work to link with aspects of learning delivered in other curriculum areas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- recording students' standards and progress in core physical education in Key Stage 4

- ensuring work in practical lessons is suited to different ability groups and uses contributions made by the students themselves.

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

I Howard Todd
Additional Inspector