

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 A Alexander
Headteacher
Exmouth Community College
Gipsy Lane
Exmouth
Devon
EX8 3AF

Dear Mr Alexander

Ofsted survey inspection programme – physical education (PE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 November 2008 to look at work in 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, 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 maths and technology status interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of eight lessons and extra-curricular activities.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall with outstanding features.

- Standards have been above the national average at Key Stage 3 for the last three years, although the number attaining Level 6 is average. Standards in GCSE and entry level PE have been on an improving trend and unvalidated data for 2008 indicate these are now above average.
- The number of students opting to take GCSE PE has been steadily increasing to the current level of about a third of the cohort. All students follow the entry level course during Key stage 4 with the vast majority being entered for the exam.

- Staff in the PE department rightly identified that A level PE did not suit the needs of all post-16 students wanting to study physical education and sport. As a consequence they have introduced both the BTEC National and BTEC Diploma courses. Post-16 students regularly achieve their best results in PE and sport.
- Progress in all lessons is good and frequently outstanding because teaching ensures consistent challenge and sets the expectation that students achieve their best at all times.
- Students make outstanding progress in their knowledge and understanding of the subject and use of the evaluate and improve strand of the PE National Curriculum. They have well developed understanding of health and fitness because of the emphasis placed on this in the curriculum. These are strengths of the department's work.
- Students identified as gifted and talented in PE have good opportunities to extend their skills. For example talented tennis players receive additional coaching sessions during their PE lessons.
- Students have good opportunities to feed back on provision including their perceptions of PE. The opportunities to take leadership qualifications or to become volunteers in PE tend to be restricted to post-16 and Key Stage 4 students.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Planning is thorough, learning objectives are clear and in the vast majority of lessons are referred to throughout to remind students of the task and what they are expected to achieve.
- All staff have extremely high expectations of students' performance levels and verbal input to lessons; as a result work is of the highest quality. Occasionally differentiated activities to challenge more able students are not always apparent. Students say that staff actively encourage everyone to achieve success.
- Staff have outstanding subject knowledge that they use well to engage students and to challenge their thinking about activities. Staff are particularly skilful at using question and answer sessions to extend students understanding of their work. Outstanding examples of this were seen in a Year 11 theory lesson and a Year 8 table tennis session through extended questioning and the use of talking partners prior to whole-group discussion and feedback.
- Good use is made of specialist teaching in dance GCSE and external coaches in extra-curricular activities.
- The pace of lessons is swift including the transition between activities. However the use of time is adversely affected when students do not arrive punctually to lessons.
- Staff use a wide variety of teaching methods, including strategies to assess learning, resources and recording to support students' learning. Particularly effective practice was seen during lessons on football and hockey when staff used a whiteboard to illustrate how to make skills and team tactics more effective. However limited use was seen of information and communication technology (ICT) in any lessons.

- The new assessment procedures, including students self-assessing their work, are helping students to have a better understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further particularly in Key Stage 3. Students increasingly understand the links between activities, especially when they are made explicit in lessons. However it is too early to see the full impact of this on achievement and standards.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum has improved significantly in the last two years. The programme is more balanced with greater variety and breadth of opportunities for students of all ages. For example the introduction of dance and outdoor and adventurous activities in Key Stage 3 and greater choice in Key Stage 4 including non-traditional activities such as golf.
- Students in Key Stage 4 have good opportunities to choose a pathway of learning covering competitive individual or team activities or an active healthy lifestyle incorporating non competitive and aesthetic activities. As a result participation rates have risen even higher.
- The range of examination courses has increased for Post-16 students although limited opportunities are available to take vocational qualifications in sport.
- Students in Key Stage 3 and those taking GCSE have the opportunity to access two hours of high quality curriculum provision each week. Students following the entry level examination course only have one hour of PE per week and only just over 50% access a further hour through extra-curricular provision.
- Students in the sixth form have one afternoon per week for sport and competitions. However this is not accessible to all as some have other timetabled activities at that time. The department makes good arrangements with the local sports centre to overcome this with sixth form students able to use the centre at other times.
- The extra-curricular programme is extensive. A unique feature is the boys' football league at lunchtime for Year 11. Older students have outstanding opportunities to experience OAA in the Himalayas and the North Pole. Students talk enthusiastically about the intra-tutor competitions. However numbers attending extra-curricular activities are low in comparison to the number in the college.
- Some good links are made with specialist subjects especially in mathematics; links are starting to increase in technology through the use of ICT but this is not yet embedded.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management is good with outstanding features.

- The head of department has outstanding knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject and is determined in his efforts to bring continuous improvement to the department's work, reflected in the improved standards. The department works very well as a team and are ambitious for success. They have used their individual strengths well to bring about these aims at pace.
- Although all members of the department are aware of the priorities and work diligently to attain them, they are not translated into a comprehensive action plan including timescales, personnel responsible for implementation and monitoring activities to fully evaluate the impact of their actions on provision.
- The department is proud of students' achievements and take every opportunity to celebrate and publish these. Students were very enthusiastic about the sports awards evenings including meeting professional sports personalities.
- Assessment procedures are relatively new and the head of department has good awareness of the need to further moderate judgements between staff. Tracking of students' progress over time does not fully reflect the four strands of the National Curriculum.
- Staff have excellent opportunities for professional development to support delivery of the curriculum such as attending gymnastics and dance courses.
- Excellent use is made of the available accommodation. A good range of resources is available, displays are bright and reflect the department's aims. Good information is available on the National Curriculum strands and 10 high quality outcomes of PE.
- You offer outstanding support to the department and consequently it has a high profile around the school. Older students consistently say that PE provision has improved significantly in the last few years and are fully appreciative of the positive changes.

Subject issue - PE contribution to the outcomes of ECM particularly 'being healthy'

PE makes a good contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters. Good attention is given to developing students' understanding of leading active healthy lives. Health and fitness are taught as a discrete aspect in the curriculum resulting in relatively high numbers using the fitness suite after school. Students work safely together in and around the PE areas especially when there are large numbers in smaller areas such as the gymnasium.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the consistent use of differentiated activities for more able students
- explore ways to increase the number of Key Stage 4 students accessing two hours of physical education and school sport.

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