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Mr C Bradey
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Dear Mr Bradey

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Physical Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 and 19 September 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, 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 interviews with staff and boys, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of seven lessons and extra-curricular activities.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Since designation as a specialist sports college, there has been a significantly improving trend in physical education standards. Standards in Key Stage 3 are now above the national average although fewer than expected attain the higher Level 6. Standards in examination groups are also now above the national average and well above the targets set in the sports college designation action plan.
- A few students attain excellence, such as world record holders for indoor rowing.

- Achievement is good or better for the vast majority of students, including those with special educational needs. However, higher attaining students are not consistently challenged in lessons and a minority are capable of more. The school has rightly focused on raising the attainment of those white boys eligible for free school meals, a group identified as underperforming although it is too early to see the impact of this work on standards.
- Students make very good progress in developing, understanding and using the four strands of the National Curriculum.
- Students are increasingly taking a variety of roles in PE lessons and increasingly take leadership roles, which they relish. The department has already identified that these could be extended further.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- The lessons observed during the visit reflect those recorded through the school's and department's monitoring procedures.
- Outstanding aspects include the effective use of teachers' subject knowledge to ensure students make progress, and the range of questioning techniques to include all boys and ensure they are all aware of what they need to do to improve. The use of questioning should be shared as aspects of good practice.
- The advanced skills teacher has excellent techniques to introduce boys to physical education terminology that helps them observe, evaluate and feed back to each other on the quality of work and the next steps of improvement.
- Assessment for learning strategies have been introduced and these are now a prominent feature of the departments work, although they are not yet consistently embedded across the department. Intervention to bring about improvement was timely.
- A good range of teaching methods is used to engage the boys in learning; they describe a four part lesson structure as 'normal' and are able to give good examples of where they use peer coaching. The pace of lessons is good. However limited opportunities are planned for boys to explore and find their own solutions to tasks.
- Good use is made of information communication technology (ICT) in examination theory classes and boys described ways in which they use technology to record and evaluate each other's work.
- Schemes of work and lesson planning are comprehensive and support teaching well.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- All boys have two hours of timetabled PE although the lack of prompt starts to a number of lessons is a concern as this loses valuable teaching and activity time.

- The curriculum offers a good range and balance of activities in both key stages, although units of work are short at only eight hours including baseline and final assessments. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been enhanced well through the new pathways of learning and a broader range of non-traditional activities such as judo and rowing.
- Good attention is paid to the development of the four strands of the National Curriculum over time and boys have good opportunities to consolidate their performance skills before moving to the next stage.
- Good links are created between PE and other subjects such as geography and mathematics and other aspects such as healthy schools status. These have been a forerunner to the changes in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum expectations from 2008 on cross subject links leading to exciting learning experiences.
- The school offers an outstanding range of enrichment activities including traditional and non-traditional activities. Boys were enthused by team sports, fitness and multi-skills clubs; they have been particularly 'fired up' by the schools successes in rowing. Participation rates in extra-curricular activities are very high with 80% of students accessing at least one hour and 45% already participating in a minimum of five hours physical education and school sport.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- The head of department and director of sport have extremely good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department based on secure evidence from monitoring activities. However, although a department action plan is in place, expected outcomes are not clearly defined enough.
- The head of department is outstanding in his vision and leadership of a very experienced team. He uses the principles of sport education very well to motivate, inspire and stimulate boys' enthusiasm for PE.
- The advanced skills teacher also has a pivotal role in the development of the PE department.
- Although peer observations occur throughout the school, there are limited opportunities to observe each other's good practice within the PE department.
- Assessment procedures are very good. The department has a comprehensive record of boys' attainment and attitudes to learning. Staff undertake a comprehensive analysis of the data, leading to outstanding knowledge of trends, the identification of any underachievement and in setting future priorities for development. National Curriculum levels of attainment have been adapted so boys understand them easily and are clearly displayed and referenced in lessons. Consequently the vast majority of boys have a good understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. However teachers in the department currently make insufficient use of the data to identify and challenge higher attaining students.

- The department makes good use of the facilities on site and locally to support the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. We discussed the extent of the school's facilities, and how these might be extended to encourage more community use. Boys also commented that they would like their own dedicated indoor sports space so that adverse weather did not interrupt their learning opportunities.

Impact of the specialist sports status has been significant across the school, with physical education and school sport having a prominent profile. Specific impact was seen, for example in:

- raised standards in PE at both key stages
- increased participation rates in PE lessons and extra curricular activities
- increased range of accreditation and leadership opportunities for boys in Key Stage 4
- the PE department leading school developments such as assessment for learning strategies, behaviour management techniques and the trialling of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) before roll out to the whole school
- the re-invigoration of the house system, introducing a level of healthy competition between boys
- increased opportunities for family learning, such as a regular table tennis club, golf and tennis weekends
- summer camps for gifted and talented boys.

Subject issue - PE contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters particularly 'being healthy'

PE makes a good contribution to the outcomes of ECM.

- The 'Attitudes to learning' survey undertaken by the school indicates that the vast majority of boys enjoy PE and frequently have more positive attitudes towards PE than other subjects. Boys talk with genuine enthusiasm about the opportunities to be active and appreciate the time staff give to PE.
- Teachers pay good attention to the safety of boys in lessons and boys are developing their own sense of safe practices in and around the PE area well.
- Boys have a good understanding of living a healthy lifestyle including the importance of hydration and eating healthily. They talk knowledgeably about the contribution PE and school sport makes to their levels of fitness.
- The department is in the final stages of completing a fitness suite on site to extend work in this area of provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure all lessons have prompt starts and consider reviewing the length of units of work to make best use of time
- increase the challenge and standards of higher attaining boys
- ensure the identified good practice such as strategies to assess learning and questioning are consistently used across the department.

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