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Dear Mr Standen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 September 2008 to look at work in planning for and implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum with particular reference to Year 7.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the planning for and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 were well above average, but were higher in mathematics than in English. At this early stage of the implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, it is not possible to make a firm judgement on its impact on achievement, but the progress of the students observed in lessons was good.

- The quality of work in exercise books confirmed the judgements on standards and achievement.
- Improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum in recent years have raised achievement so that it is now securely good across the school and improving over time.

- Students enjoy their education and speak about it enthusiastically. They have very good attitudes to learning and their behaviour is excellent.
- They value the quality of their personal development as much as their academic progress and appreciate the well structured personal education programme at the school.
- They participate keenly in the clubs and societies which cater for a wide range of interests and tastes.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in Year 7 is good.

- The subject knowledge of teachers is excellent.
- Lessons have clear learning objectives which are shared well with the students so that they have a good understanding of the purpose of activities. The objectives focus well on subject specific skills but do not point out when the students will be developing skills that will be useful across the curriculum.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in lessons, particularly to encourage independent and group research.
- Good questioning techniques probe the students' understanding and extend their knowledge in lessons.
- In some lessons a variety of independent, paired, group and whole class work engages the students in their learning very well, promoting skills in discussion, exploring hypotheses and negotiating with others.
- Lessons typically provide students with a good range of oral, written and reading tasks.
- Assessment techniques enable teachers and students to monitor and reflect on progress and consider the next steps in improving achievement productively.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the new curriculum in Year 7 is good.

- The school's specialist status in science makes an outstanding contribution to improving the curriculum across the school. The science department models excellent practice in curriculum design for other departments. It encourages links between subjects in lessons and in whole school activities. This is having a profound and beneficial impact on the school curriculum.
- The new curriculum builds on the strengths of the previous model, modifying the content to meet new requirements and making the most of the new curriculum's opportunities while retaining the rigour of existing practice.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum contains opportunities for providing extra support in English for those who would benefit from it and ensures that skills in mathematics and ICT are provided for well.
- A distinctive feature of the curriculum is the provision of laptops to Year 7 students which they use routinely in all subjects at school and at home. ICT is increasingly making a very good contribution to the

students' education at school while developing important skills for their future.

- The school has set up special weeks of carefully planned activities which promote the students' personal, learning and thinking skills well. These skills are also taught well in individual subjects. The extra time available in the new curriculum is being used to identify and utilise connections between subjects productively. However, the coverage of these skills across the curriculum and their assessment would benefit from further consideration.
- Departments are at different stages of developing schemes of work to meet the new requirements of the new curriculum within their subjects, with some being fully ready with excellent provision, as in science, and others requiring further development.
- The non-statutory Dimensions of the new curriculum have been used well in planning so that all students have access to good provision for their personal and academic development.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

The quality of the leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is good.

- Excellent leadership and management of the school's specialist status in science have made an outstanding contribution to strategic planning for the new curriculum.
- Very good monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum over recent years resulted in changes which in many respects anticipated the new requirements and opportunities, particularly with regard to reducing duplicated content and maximising enjoyment and achievement.
- Good use has been made of training opportunities provided nationally, locally and within school so that the new requirements and the associated challenges and opportunities have been understood and responded to positively by staff.
- Middle leaders have responded well to the new curriculum, considering how to modify their schemes of work effectively, although there is some inconsistency in the rate of progress between subjects.
- Leadership and management are successfully focused on improving achievement. The accelerating rate of improvement in the students' achievement across the school indicates that there is outstanding capacity to improve the new curriculum.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- The school has good systems for ensuring that the needs of the students are addressed so that all students are enabled to make good progress in their personal and academic development.
- The new curriculum is accessible to all the students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing how well personal, learning and thinking skills are covered in subjects and made explicit in lessons
- ensuring that all subjects are progressing at the same rate in planning and implementing the new curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the curriculum 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

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector