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Dr S Thornton
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Dear Dr Thornton

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 04 November 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 new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 were in line with the national average, but with fewer students at the higher levels. 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.

- In recent years, standards at Key Stage 3 have risen and are now above average. Achievement has improved and is now good.
- Standards of speaking and listening are above average and the students make good progress across the school, reflecting the school's focus on these areas.

- Students enjoy school. They are enthusiastic about the many opportunities to take an active part in their learning.
- Students value and eagerly participate in the many clubs and societies on offer in the school which cover a full range of interests.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Lesson objectives are precise, with clear links to subject requirements and to skills which are valuable across the curriculum.
- Lessons are briskly paced and purposeful.
- Good questioning techniques probe students' understanding and encourage them to explore different viewpoints and theories.
- Students are given ample opportunity in lessons to reflect on their progress and that of their peers.
- Teachers and teaching assistants support individuals and groups in their learning well.
- Students benefit from plenty of opportunities for speaking and listening in whole class, paired and group arrangements.
- In discussion, the students were clearly aware of the cross-curricular skills being taught across subjects and of the dimensions underpinning the curriculum.
- Although the quality of marking is sometimes good and helps the students to understand how to improve their work, this is not consistent in all subjects.
- Insufficient use is sometimes made of assessment information from Year 6 and teachers are not always aware of the styles of teaching and learning in the students' previous schools.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The new curriculum builds sensibly on the strengths of the previous arrangements.
- Students enjoy their learning and find the curriculum relevant and interesting.
- The school is meeting the requirements of the new National Curriculum subject orders.
- The school's specialist status in business and enterprise makes an excellent contribution to the new curriculum, which benefits from strong links with local industry and businesses, leading to interesting and useful projects. Specialist status also makes a good contribution to the students' financial and economic awareness.
- The local environment is used well to provide a context for work in subjects. For example, work in science about rock formations refers effectively to the local Cornish coastline.
- The dimensions of the new National Curriculum are used well to plan links between subjects. This provides a sound basis for developing personal, learning and thinking skills and functional skills. Departments are covering these skills in their own areas well, but the school does

not have sufficient knowledge of what is happening across subjects to ensure that all skills receive equal coverage.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The school has made good use of national, local and school based training to arrive at a common understanding of the new requirements and to consider the best model of delivery in the school. A good programme of meetings and consultations has ensured that middle leaders have been effectively involved in the process.
- Subject departments are increasingly working together, sharing planning to address the common elements of the new curriculum. In particular, they play a major role in ensuring that common dimensions are taught across subjects in a coherent way.
- Although personal, learning and thinking skills are taught well in lessons, there is as yet no coherent plan to ensure their consistent coverage across departments.
- Strategic planning for the future development of the new curriculum is thorough. Robust arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the new curriculum are in place.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- All groups of students make good progress in their learning.
- The curriculum is accessible to all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that marking consistently and regularly provides students with a clear knowledge of their achievements and what they should do to improve the quality of their work
- reviewing the teaching of personal, learning and thinking skills across the school to ensure that they are given equal coverage
- improving transition from Year 6.

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