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Mr P Hasan-Richardson
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Dear Mr Hasan-Richardson

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 05 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.

An acting headteacher has been in place since June 2008 as a result of the illness of the substantive headteacher.

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 are average. 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 students in lessons was good.

- The quality of work in exercise books shows students are making good progress. Students report that work in lessons challenges them and they are acquiring new skills.

- A well planned range of activities, trips and visits promotes students' good personal development and well-being. This is seen in their positive attitudes to learning and their good behaviour. Explicit attention has been paid to socialising and team building skills. As a result students work well together and take an active part in lessons. However, although their speaking skills are good, they are not as good at listening to each other and developing each others' responses.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and there are positive relationships between Year 7 students and teachers. Management of behaviour is good and ensures a calm, work-focussed environment in lessons.
- Teachers have good questioning skills and plan lessons which enable students to work in a variety of ways. Students understand what is expected of them and confidently respond to the varied teaching and learning approaches.
- Lessons are well planned, and include activities which promote students personal, learning and thinking skills. Care is taken to ensure learning is relevant to students. This sparks off students' natural curiosity, enabling them to make links between lessons and the world outside; as a result, students enjoy their lessons.
- Good examples of peer and self-assessment were seen in lessons. There are also examples of marking which gives clear guidance to students as to how to improve their work. However, this practice is not yet consistently embedded across the work of all teachers.
- Work on the new curriculum has resulted in teachers' having higher academic expectations of students and this is seen in the increased challenge provided to students in lessons. Opportunities to challenge students to be more independent in their learning are not always utilised.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- A strategic approach has been taken to developing the new curriculum. Attention has been paid to the needs of learners which has resulted in lessons that are engaging and relevant. Consequently, students participate actively in their learning and enjoy it.
- All departments have reviewed their schemes of work and utilised opportunities presented by the new curriculum to focus on the skills students need to make progress. Schemes of work have been redesigned to explicitly incorporate personal, learning and thinking skills. Subject leaders are in the process of planning the best way to assess progress in these areas.
- Good links with primary schools and opportunities to have formal discussions with all Year 7 parents mean careful attention has been

paid to the needs of students when arranging classes. This has meant classes work well together as cohesive entities.

- Plans are well underway to provide Year 7 students with a more creative and innovative curriculum next year. Teams of teachers, led by senior leaders, are working to write schemes of work which will bring together a range of subjects to provide students with a more cohesive, integrated curriculum. Plans, including for the redesign of buildings, have been carefully structured to ensure those who need support or extension will be able to access it.
- Opportunities presented by the school's specialism in business and enterprise have not yet been fully utilised.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The curriculum has been reviewed and developed in a systematic manner in order to raise standards and ensure students have relevant and meaningful learning opportunities. Resources and time have been allocated to ensure this work is effective.
- Senior leaders have been strategic in ensuring that teachers are supported effectively to make the necessary changes. A research based approach has been taken to ensure the new curriculum meets the needs of students. Teachers have been given the time to observe practice in other schools. Senior leaders have carefully monitored the progress in implementing the new curriculum. However, a formal system for evaluating developments, including ascertaining students' responses, has not yet been established.
- Although changes to the current Year 7 curriculum have been made, a more innovative approach will be undertaken in September 2009. This has been well thought out and the additional time taken has resulted in greater confidence of teachers to deliver the new curriculum.
- Subject leaders are well informed and enthusiastic about the opportunities afforded to them by the reduction in content. They have good knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum. Teachers have welcomed the support and training offered within school and externally and are clear where further support is required.
- An in-house coaching model has been developed to support teachers in responding to the demands of the new curriculum. This is at an early stage but teachers are very positive about the opportunity to develop their practice by working with colleagues.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- One to one meetings with all Year 7 parents and with Year 6 teachers ensure good information is available to all staff in order to effectively plan to meet students' needs. Vulnerable students are supported particularly well in the transition from primary to secondary school and have extra induction days prior to starting in Year 7.

- Students who need support to catch up or who have behavioural or social needs are supported very well by student mentors, support staff and the inclusion manager who is a trained social worker.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- greater use of students' views in informing curriculum development
- an explicit evaluation process to monitor developments as the new curriculum is embedded across the school.

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

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector