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Dear Mr Dickson

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 07 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 are below 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 satisfactory.

- The quality of work in exercise books shows students are making satisfactory progress. Students report they are acquiring new skills and knowledge.
- Year 7 students' personal development and well-being is good. They demonstrated good behaviour in the lessons observed and have

positive attitudes to learning. Students report that in a few lessons a minority of students hinder the learning of others.

- Senior leaders have placed a strong emphasis on developing students' social and personal skills and the impact of this is evident. Students are able to consider ideas thoughtfully and respond well to questions. However, their literacy levels are sometimes low and this hinders their ability to express themselves. Teachers are not always explicit in developing these skills.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Relationships between students and staff are good. Classrooms are work focussed environments and teachers are adept at managing behaviour.
- Students report they have opportunities to work in a variety of ways. However, in lessons teachers do not always use a wide range of teaching and learning methods. Lessons are sometimes overly led by teachers and opportunities to develop students' independence in their learning are missed.
- Work on the new curriculum has raised teachers' knowledge of the skills students already have. There is good information available to teachers about students' prior achievement. However, this is not always used at the planning stage to ensure that lessons fully challenge students.
- Learning conversations with form tutors have ensured students have good understanding of where they are in their learning. In the majority of subjects students have explicit curriculum targets informing them how to improve their work. While some teachers provide helpful feedback to students in their books, this is not consistent and students do not always act on their advice.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- A pragmatic, staged approach has been taken to curriculum development. Senior leaders have very good understanding of the needs of the students and have prioritised the development of personal, learning and thinking skills to ensure students' are well prepared for learning.
- Subject leaders have reviewed existing schemes of work and are developing new schemes of work. They are positive about the flexibility afforded by the reduced content and welcome opportunities to be creative and collaborative. However, this work is at an early stage and the opportunities afforded by the new curriculum have not been fully exploited yet.
- There are strong curriculum links with primary schools. This includes teachers collaborating with Year 5 and 6 teachers to develop their

understanding of the primary curriculum. Transition from primary to secondary school is managed well. Parents of students joining the school benefit from the opportunity to have one to one meetings with senior leaders and a significant number have been involved in the Year 7 family learning event.

- The school's specialism in computing is evident across the curriculum. However, cross curricular work in mathematics is less well developed.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- Senior leaders have high expectations of students and are strongly committed to raising standards. Systems to monitor and evaluate the curriculum are good. This means that senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school. They recognise that work on developing the new curriculum is at an early stage and practice is inconsistent across the school.
- Good use has been made of data, also available electronically to parents, to ensure staff are aware of the standards students should be achieving. However, they acknowledge that this data is not always translated into increased challenge in lessons.
- Subject leaders are well informed and the opportunities for professional development have enabled them to learn from good practice within the school, utilise external support and commission new training in the 'innovations' meetings.
- Senior leaders have been pragmatic in their approach to developing the curriculum and have sought to balance demands on teachers. Good progress has been made in developing personal, learning and thinking skills across the curriculum but development within subjects are at differing stages and opportunities to collaborate across subjects have not yet been utilised.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is satisfactory.

- There has been good provision in the curriculum to ensure students who need extra help are able to access it. Lower attaining students benefit from extra English and mathematics lessons. The school ensures that when students no longer require additional support they are re-engaged in the main curriculum. However, students are not always challenged as much as they should be in lessons, therefore their progress is sometimes no better than satisfactory.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- accelerate students' progress by using data effectively when planning lessons to ensure students are challenged

- develop students' independence in learning by employing a greater range of teaching and learning strategies
- improve students' literacy skills across the 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

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector