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Dear Mr Hazeldine

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

Thank you for the hospitality and co-operation of your staff during my visit on 30 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 five 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 broadly average. Implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum began earlier than required and, already, the process is having a satisfactory impact on standards and achievement and a good impact on personal development.

- The quality of work and rates of progress in lessons broadly match recent published results indicating average standards and satisfactory achievement.
- However, changes to both the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 were implemented in 2007 and have significantly improved students' attitudes and involvement in lessons.
- Staff confidence in the use of assessment has also risen.

- Marked rises in 2008 national tests partly reflect these changes. During 2007 many teachers of Year 9 adopted the new approaches learnt during training for the new Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Students' personal development already reveals good benefits from curricular and teaching changes. Students talk with enthusiasm about the high levels of participation and enjoyment they experience in lessons, especially where new approaches have been adopted most fully.
- Staff confirm a significant improvement in students' awareness of their progress and capabilities with regard to personal and learning skills.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- The subject knowledge of teachers is good. Those teaching across a range of subjects, as part of the new modified curriculum, have adapted well to such changes.
- Teachers use learning objectives well and the best lessons involve frequent reference to the objectives to check how learning is proceeding. Some objectives involve personal or learning skills but this is not consistent.
- Teaching generally promotes strong participation by students and in some lessons develops this to include self-assessment and peer-assessment. Level descriptions were referred to in a minority of cases. Group and paired work are prominent in the better practice. Work to stretch the most able is not always provided.
- Satisfactory teaching and learning predominates, with good participation rates but less scope for creativity, independence and reflection than seen in the good lessons.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The school has made very good use of its specialist Arts College status to promote staff understanding and acceptance of new curricular requirements. Features such as high student involvement, self and peer assessment, paired and group work and scope for reflection and creativity were already well established in much teaching of arts subjects. This experience has been drawn on to help train colleagues and design new schemes of work in all subjects.
- By adopting a skills and attitudes based course predating new Key Stage 3 requirements, this school began change early. It has benefited by establishing carefully constructed cross-curricular programmes for humanities and arts subjects in Year 7 which are intrinsically good in quality and help define good practice for the rest of the curriculum.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum contains opportunities for providing extra support for students who experience difficulties in English and mathematics. Its provision of challenge for more able students is less consistent. Skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are provided for well.

- Students' personal, learning and thinking skills are promoted well. They are clearly identified in all long term and medium term planning but are less consistently built into lesson planning.
- Schemes of work to meet the new requirements of the new curriculum within their subjects are good in many departments, while others require 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.

- The school made a valuable early start to implementation of current requirements. Perceiving a general desire for improvement amongst staff, following some disappointing Key Stage 3 national test results, senior leaders took the opportunity to introduce a programme of curricular change in 2007. This entailed learning the fresh approach to curriculum planning and teaching that the new curriculum demands. The programme enabled early implementation in humanities and the arts and allowed subsequent training and curriculum construction to benefit from this experience.
- Good use has been made of the specialist arts college status. The planning and leadership experience of key staff have been successfully drawn on and their good classroom practice emulated by others.
- Leadership and management have provided good quality training and succeeded in gaining a positive response to the new requirements from a very diverse teaching body.
- In addition, good use has been made of training opportunities provided nationally and locally.
- Middle leaders have all produced good medium and long term plans, but vary in their approach to lesson planning and monitoring implementation.
- The progress made thus far indicates that the school has focussed firmly on seeking to raise standards and improved personal development. It has demonstrated a good capacity for further improvement in the curriculum.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- The school has capable staff overseeing inclusion and they ensure students make good progress in their personal development and match the progress of their peers in academic subjects.
- The new curriculum is accessible to all the students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the personalising of the curriculum consistently leads to the provision of challenging work for the more able students
- ensuring that lesson planning includes the features seen where current practice is best, namely: scope for self-assessment; personal, learning and thinking skills used as lesson objectives; appropriate use of paired and group work.

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

Bob Drew
Additional Inspector