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Dear Mr Conboy

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 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 four Year 7 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 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 the pupils observed in lessons was good.

- The quality of work seen in exercise books confirmed the judgements on standards and achievement.
- Good progress is the result of good teaching and learning and the changes to the curriculum. This is now more responsive to individual needs, the provision the school is making for the most vulnerable students and its commitment to inclusion.
- Students' personal development is good. They are confident, well adjusted young people who enjoy school, feel secure and have the personal

qualities and skills needed for success. Behaviour is good and students are supportive of each other. Those students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are accepted and treated as equals. The personal education programme and good pastoral support underpin students' personal development and well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. They plan lessons well to meet the learning needs of all students and they monitor and assess their progress effectively.
- Teachers' expectations of students are high and learning objectives are challenging.
- Students who are vulnerable or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated into lessons and make good progress. They are well supported by teaching assistants who also challenge and extend the learning of the highest attaining students.
- There is a consistent approach to behaviour management and as a result students' attitudes to learning are good.
- Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching.
- There is inconsistency in the use of teachers' questioning to challenge and stretch the lowest attaining students.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The school's specialist status in sport makes a good contribution to improving the curriculum across the school and extending students' experiences and sense of achievement outside lessons.
- The school has made good progress in adapting schemes of work to incorporate the revised National Curriculum.
- The Year 7 curriculum makes a significant contribution to students' creativity, their ability to work collaboratively and independently and their enjoyment. This is particularly apparent in the provision for dance for all Year 7 students.
- The school has mapped existing provision and planned for the development of students' functional skills and their personal, learning and thinking skills. There is a discrete fortnightly lesson, likely to increase to once a week, where such skills are taught. The school is well placed to evaluate the impact of the changes at an appropriate time in the near future because existing monitoring and evaluation procedures have already proved their effectiveness.
- Curriculum provision for the use of ICT as a learning aid is very good.
- There are extensive extra-curricular clubs, activities and sporting opportunities which are well attended. The school has as a development priority the use of such provision to improve further students' skills and personal qualities.

- There are excellent links with primary schools to ensure continuity of curriculum provision on transfer.

Leadership and management

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

- Planning is excellent and as a result there is a sense of purpose and direction at all levels of leadership and management and morale is high.
- There has been very good monitoring, evaluation and adaptation of the curriculum over the last year, resulting in a significant improvement in the standards reached by the highest attaining students.
- There is consistency in the way agreed policies and practices are implemented.
- The result of these strengths is that the school is excellently placed to maintain and build on the momentum of improvement from the last academic year.
- The school's commitment to equality of opportunity, grounded in its Christian values, permeates all that the staff work for.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is outstanding.

- The excellent provision for vulnerable Year 7 students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures they are fully integrated into the life of the school, feel valued and respected and are well placed to increase their present good rate of progress as they move through the school.
- The new curriculum is accessible to all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the rigour and challenge of teachers' questioning for the lowest attaining students to challenge them academically
- reviewing the way in which extra-curricular provision is used to develop students' personal qualities and skills.

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

Brian Dower
Additional Inspector