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Mr R Mundy
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Dear Mr Mundy

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 03 October 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 and a tutorial session.

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

Achievement and standards

Standards in Year 7 are average overall and achievement is satisfactory.

- It is too early to quantify the overall impact on standards and achievement of the new curriculum, but there are indications. For instance, where it is most fully implemented, progress rates in lessons are strongest. Similarly, students' personal development is most effective where introduction of the new curriculum is well advanced.
- Standards are broadly average in English, mathematics and science, with some non-core subjects, such as history and physical education, helping students reach above-average standards.

- Achievement in Year 7 is satisfactory, matching previous published information on progress. School data about current achievement between Year 4 and Year 8 suggests a stronger and improving picture.
- In a significant minority of lessons, good use of group work, self-assessment and individual responsibilities promote good progress as well as strong personal development. These features partly pre-date the new key stage curriculum requirements but have been boosted by their introduction.
- Students' personal development is good and the new curriculum is making a satisfactory contribution to this process. Some students start with challenging behaviour and limited skills in managing their emotions. The school's recent focus on behaviour management has been effective. Students are generally polite, confident and aware of other people's needs. The new curriculum is beginning to give students greater access to group work and more understanding of how to learn and evaluate their own progress.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- In Year 7 there is a very wide range in the quality of teaching and learning. In its own monitoring, the school accurately notes some good teaching, occasionally outstanding lessons, but records a predominately satisfactory quality, with a minority that is inadequate.
- Strengths in the best lessons match many of the features central to new Key Stage 3 requirements: effective independent and group research; regular review of learning objectives and success criteria; good use of new resources; and a clear focus on students analysing how they learn.
- Overall, Year 7 lessons are inconsistent in reflecting these features, but are typically secure, leading to satisfactory progress.
- Support and guidance relating to personal development is generally good, while use of assessment is satisfactory and a school focus for further improvement.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The introduction of the new curriculum has taken place during a phase in which other issues had greater prominence in school planning. However, appropriate planning and implementation have begun and are broadly in line with the schedule operating nationally.
- All core subjects have produced medium term outlines comprising short units of work. In some cases, for instance in mathematics, there is already coverage for the whole of Year 7. Other subjects hope to complete this task by the summer. Lesson planning varies, with some plans identifying and successfully implementing the specific personal, learning and thinking skills being promoted during the session. Others do not explicitly refer to the new curriculum.

- The Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) programme of study is already well developed and is helping promote good personal development. A particularly good session was seen during the visit which demonstrated good use of local experts, in this instance leading a session on Black History and the skills for designing presentations.
- Where the high participation of students has been planned for in lessons, enjoyment and creativity are flourishing. A very effective history lesson achieved this by promoting sustained, well-structured group work with extensive reporting back to the class. An equally good physical education lesson offered students a very high level of responsibility, leading the whole class in a warm-up session, which students found captivating.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The headteacher is beginning his second year in post, with a new senior team. Adequate attention has been given to introducing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum: in-house training for staff has been effective and local authority subject-based provision has been accessed well.
- The school's recent preoccupation with improving behaviour management and assessment skills has been successful. While it has reduced the direct focus on Key Stage 3 implementation, it has created a more secure setting for its introduction.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is satisfactory.

- Vulnerable students make satisfactory progress in Year 7 and equality and diversity are existing areas of strength.
- The new curriculum is further strengthening this position because there is now more class teaching in Year 7 and students are increasingly well known by tutors. Their needs are being picked up and acted upon even more quickly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- finishing the construction of medium and long-term plans for Years 7 and 8
- ensuring that specific personal, learning and thinking skills and functional skills are explicitly written into lessons plans
- build on good practice in group work, independent learning and self and peer review already present in some teaching and learning.

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