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Mr T Hardiker
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Dear Mr Hardiker

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 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 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 students observed in lessons was good.

- The quality of work seen in exercise books confirmed the judgements on standards and achievement. Year 7 students reported that they were making good progress and that they found their work interesting and enjoyable.
- There has been a significant rise in standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 compared to the above average results of 2007. This is because of marked improvements in the monitoring of students' progress, effective mentoring

of those at risk of underachievement and the setting of challenging performance targets for all students in all subjects.

- Year 7 students' attitudes to learning are exemplary and their behaviour is excellent. They appreciate the level of individual attention and help they receive in lessons.
- They are developing a good understanding of the coherence of their learning experiences across subjects. For example, they talked about how they had to be well organised, show initiative and think through problems for themselves.
- The provision for students' personal development is good. There is a well structured programme of personal, social, health and economic education which has been suitably modified to incorporate the new programmes of study.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers' subject knowledge is extensive and they keep up-to-date with pedagogic and curriculum developments.
- They have high expectations of students and they plan learning activities which are demanding and interesting.
- Students respond well to such challenge and are highly motivated. They know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve because their work is closely monitored and they receive timely, pertinent feedback on their progress.
- Lessons are characterised by a variety of whole-class, group and individual work which provide variety and sustain interest. Support for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are vulnerable is well directed and effective.
- Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching.
- Questioning probes and extends students' understanding. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to explore the meaning of key words or phrases with students to encourage precision in their use of language.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The school regularly reviews curriculum provision to ensure that students' academic and personal needs are met. It has successfully incorporated the new requirements, ensuring that the skills that are already successfully taught fully embrace functional and personal, learning and thinking skills.
- Good progress has been made in adapting schemes of work to incorporate the revised National Curriculum.
- 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.
- The school's specialist status in technology has contributed to improvements in the use of ICT for teaching and learning, particularly in

the provision of personalised learning programmes to consolidate and extend learning which can be used at home as well as in school.

- Links with feeder primary schools to ensure curriculum and teaching continuity for students do exist but they are down to teachers' individual initiative. There is no whole school, coordinated approach to developing these further to match the good practice seen in ensuring students' smooth personal development from Year 6 to Year 7.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The introduction of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum has been managed well. The review of existing provision, the excellent planning to incorporate any necessary changes and to train staff, the schools' existing procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of provision, have all contributed to a successful start in implementing those changes.
- Excellent planning for change has resulted in a sense of common purpose at all levels of leadership and management. Subject and pastoral leaders are well briefed and have clearly defined roles in meeting the improvement priorities in the school's development plan.
- The school's accelerating rate of improvement in students' progress over the last year testifies to an excellent capacity to build on the already substantial achievements.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- The small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are vulnerable are supported well, are fully involved in all that the new curriculum offers and make good and improving progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- encouraging precision in students' use of language in lessons
- working with feeder primary schools to improve continuity in the curriculum and in learning from Year 6 to Year 7.

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