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Dear Miss Campbell

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 21 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 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 students observed in lessons was good.

- The quality of the work seen in exercise books confirmed the judgements on standards and progress. Year 7 students say that they are making good progress.

- Standards across the school have risen over the last three years. The school's technology specialist status has contributed significantly to this.
- Students' personal development is good. Attendance rates are average but are good compared to those of many similar schools. Students enjoy their work, speak enthusiastically about the cross-curricular themes and many participate in the wide range of clubs and activities and trips out of school. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent.
- The contribution students make to the school community is excellent. Year 7 students spoke about the support and encouragement they receive from the seniors in their House form groups and see this as contributing significantly to their sense of well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- The quality of the teaching seen ranged from good to outstanding.
- There was intellectual challenge in the best lessons. Students were required to question assumptions and consider different perspectives on a given event; they were asked to reflect on the concepts of change and progress and under what conditions one led to the other.
- In some lessons teachers' questioning failed to present the same rigorous challenge.
- Students say they enjoy the variety of learning activities and the experience of having different teachers. They like the balance struck between whole class work and group activities.
- Students make very good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their learning as a result of the increased resources and expertise brought about by the specialist status.
- Technology college status has led to students being more independent and creative in their learning.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- Excellent arrangements are in place to give continuity of learning from the primary schools to Year 7.
- The curriculum links with primary schools are excellent.
- Excellent use is being made of cross curricular themes in Year 7 to give coherence to students' education, develop their personal and learning skills and broaden their understanding of the world around them.
- The school's specialist status in technology makes an outstanding contribution to improving the curriculum. Students are video recording their work to inform others and also to play back and evaluate what they have done. Extensive opportunities for the use of ICT across the curriculum have led to a significant improvement in this functional skill.
- The school has mapped existing provision and planned for the development of students' personal, learning and thinking skills. There are

special weeks set aside for the development of such skills but the school is looking to make more effective provision by integrating this work into mainstream lessons.

- The extensive range of extra-curricular provision contributes well to students' creative, social, emotional and physical development.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The work the school has done over recent years anticipated aspects of the new opportunities. There are excellent links with the primary schools and impressive transition arrangements to ensure continuity of provision. The Year 7 cross-curricular themes are exemplary and impacting significantly on students' enjoyment and understanding of their work.
- An excellent start has been made in implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. Staff have taken advantage of the training provided by the local authority and made good use of in-school professional development. Departments have worked hard to adapt schemes of work to comply with the new requirements, although there is some inconsistency in the rate of progress between subjects.
- Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the new curriculum are not as advanced as the excellent plans for its implementation.
- Middle leaders report that teachers are positive about the changes and particularly welcome the additional flexibility.
- The actions leaders and managers have taken in the past to raise standards have been successful and so the school has excellent capacity to secure further improvements to provision.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- Year 7 students say they feel understood and valued because of the early identification of their needs and the smooth and effective transition arrangements.
- Good use is made of the transition projects to assess students' skills and capabilities and then modify the curriculum to make it accessible to all.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that all subjects are progressing at the same rate in planning and implementing the new curriculum
- plan for the review and evaluation of the impact of the new curriculum on students' academic and personal development.

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