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Mr S Wilson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wilson

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 23 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 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, including that of the large number of students of Asian backgrounds.

- The quality of the work seen in exercise books confirmed the judgements on standards and progress.
- Standards of presentation in those books are variable because some students struggle to organise and present their work well.
- Students say they are making good progress because they enjoy lessons and like their teachers.

- Achievement across the school is now good because there has been a significant rise in standards by the end of Year 11.
- Year 7 students' personal development is good. Attendance rates are average and compared to schools in similar circumstances they are good. Exclusions have dropped considerably.
- The behaviour seen in lessons was excellent and Year 7 students say they learn well because they feel safe and free from any form of bullying or intimidation.
- They are enthusiastic about the many extra-curricular activities and participation rates are high.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Good teaching was seen because the learning objectives were appropriate and challenging and learning activities were varied and focused on students working together to find out things for themselves.
- Students could explain the learning skills they were using in a particular learning activity but their understanding of the transferability of those skills across the curriculum was not so well developed.
- Working relationships are excellent. Students listen well, concentrate for extended periods of time and help each other out in lessons.
- Teachers make very good use of time. In the lessons seen, students had opportunities to talk about what they had learnt with each other and the teacher.
- Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT), particularly to encourage independent and group research.
- Good questioning tests students' understanding but it is rarely directed at those who never raise a hand.
- Students who are vulnerable or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated into lessons and make good progress. Teaching assistants play a key role in supporting them.
- Teachers monitor and assess students' learning carefully but the maximum use is not always made of the information gathered. Although varied, learning activities are sometimes not structured at different levels of difficulty to challenge and extend every group in the class.

### Quality of the curriculum

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

- The school has made good progress in adapting schemes of work to incorporate the revised National Curriculum. Greater prominence is now given to students' personal, learning and thinking skills.
- Planning to give students greater coherence in their learning by making the connections between subjects clear is at an early stage. The focus of that planning is to use special events and cross-curricular themes to do this.

- Good practice exists to inform such developments, for example in the use of theatre productions which exploit the skills students use in careers, drama, English and science.
- There are good curriculum links with primary schools, particularly in sport and ICT.
- There are extensive and well attended extra-curricular activities to enrich and extend learning.
- The school's personal, social and health education programme provides well for students' personal development. It covers most of the non-statutory elements of the revised National Curriculum, and the school has incorporated economic well-being and financial capability into the scheme of work.
- Good use is already made of the greater flexibility in the curriculum to extend creativity, for example through students use of digital video and photography in their learning.

### Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The introduction of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum has been handled well by the senior leaders. There has been a thorough analysis of existing provision and staff are already modifying their lesson plans to take advantage of the greater flexibility presented by the new arrangements.
- Staff are well informed about the developments because good use has been made of local, national and in-school training opportunities.
- Middle leaders have been fully involved in planning for and implementing the changes. They are keen to achieve a better balance in lessons between curriculum content and the development of students' learning skills.
- The role of the progress development managers in raising standards is well defined but at various stages of development across the different age groups.
- Leaders and managers have been successful in quickening the rate of students' progress and raising standards and are therefore well placed to improve achievement further.

### Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- Effective support in lessons and appropriate and timely withdrawal for additional help enable vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress.
- The curriculum is well designed and accessible to all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending students' understanding of the links between subjects and the transfer of learning skills across the curriculum

- aligning the work of Progress and Development Managers more closely with students' academic progress.

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