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Mrs A Stokes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Stokes

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 04 December 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

The overall effectiveness of the planning for and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 were above the national 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.

- Work in exercise books in a range of subjects confirmed the judgement of progress in lessons and showed that the school's expectations of the students is high.
- The curriculum makes a good contribution to the personal development and well-being of the students, who report that they enjoy their education very much. They are well motivated and keen to learn.

- Students speak enthusiastically about the range of clubs and societies in which they keenly participate.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Lessons are briskly paced and purposeful, with a range of activities successfully designed to motivate the students, increase their subject knowledge and develop skills that are useful across the curriculum and beyond school.
- There is an emphasis on active learning and careful reflection, which involves the students in their learning and encourages them to consider how they might improve their standards.
- Personal learning and thinking skills and functional skills are increasingly integrated into lessons, which is having a beneficial effect on achievement in subjects and on developing skills that are essential for success later in life. Strategies to assess these skills have been introduced and are being carefully evaluated by the school.
- Exercise books show that a good range of work has been completed in terms of volume, breadth and challenge across the curriculum since the start of the year.
- Exercise books show, and students report, that marking is regular, thorough and points out next steps for learning clearly.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The new curriculum builds successfully on the previous model which was judged outstanding in the last inspection.
- The structure of the new curriculum retains subject disciplines while ensuring that teaching and learning styles are varied and that common skills are developed across subjects.
- Although personal learning and thinking skills and functional skills are being taught well across subjects, drawing on work done in the school in the last few years, the school has not yet audited their coverage to ensure that they are all given appropriate weight in the curriculum.
- The non-statutory Dimensions of the new curriculum have been effectively mapped across the curriculum.
- The school has introduced special days of activities across the curriculum, which reinforce the work done in lessons to develop the skills of the students. The plans for future days are well conceived and build on a careful evaluation of the effectiveness of the work completed so far.
- The curriculum is responsive to the identified needs of the students and to the school's locality.
- Specialist status in business and enterprise and in science makes a good contribution to curriculum development.
- Displays around the school celebrate students' work effectively.
- Students report that they find the curriculum stimulating and there is ample opportunity for creativity across subjects.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The school has made excellent use of externally provided training for senior and subject leaders in planning for and implementing the new curriculum.
- Senior leaders have ensured that training time within school has been used productively to explain the requirements of the new curriculum and what they mean for the school.
- Time has been allocated effectively for staff to develop the curriculum in their subject areas. The work has been carefully planned to fit in with other school priorities.
- The changes have been welcomed by middle leaders and teaching staff. The introduction of the new curriculum has been accompanied by rigorous self-evaluation. Changes are monitored and evaluated regularly and clearly, involving the whole school community in the process including the students.
- The school is well aware of what needs to be done to continue developing the curriculum and has excellent capacity to do so effectively.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- The curriculum is accessible to all students and support for students in their learning is good.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enabled to make similar progress to all other students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- conducting an audit of the coverage of personal learning and thinking and skills and functional skills in subjects across the curriculum.

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

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector