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Mr N Armstrong
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Armstrong

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 02 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 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 are well above 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 outstanding.

- The quality of work seen in exercise books confirmed the judgements on standards and progress in Year 7.
- The school's assessments show that the excellent progress seen in Year 7 is maintained in Year 8 and that students' attainment when they start High School in Year 9 is significantly above expected levels.

- Year 7 students say they are making rapid progress because they find their work challenging and enjoyable.
- Their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are highly developed, preparing them exceptionally well for the next stage in their education.
- Year 7 students' personal development is outstanding because they are mature and responsible for their age. They were perceptive in conversation and respectful of the views of others. Their attendance is consistently well above the national norm and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- They gain in independence, self-esteem and well-being from the activities the school offers outside lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Outstanding teaching was seen because teachers' subject knowledge is excellent, the learning objectives they set matches students' needs well and their questioning techniques calls for students to think clearly and logically.
- Learning activities are varied and challenging. Students are made to think for themselves, work independently and assess their own progress.
- Year 7 students talked about the teaching strategies they found most conducive to learning and could explain the way they used their leaning skills flexibly across subjects.
- Their speaking and listening skills are particularly well developed.
- There have been significant improvements in ICT and its use as a tool for teaching and learning is now good.
- The monitoring and assessment of students' progress is done exceptionally well. Students know their learning targets and the assessment criteria and so can judge for themselves how well they are doing.
- Students say they like their teachers because they are approachable and have a sense of humour as well as being good at their job.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- Subject leaders have made good progress in adapting schemes of work to incorporate the revised National Curriculum. This has been part of an ongoing process of curriculum review and development at departmental level to ensure that provision is responsive to students' needs.
- A whole school review of the breadth and balance of the curriculum to capitalise on the increased flexibility the changes have brought and to give greater coherence to students' learning is planned for January. It will also be used to plan for functional skills in the curriculum.
- The school's personal, social and health education programme makes a significant contribution to students' well-being and already incorporates

economic awareness and financial capability. The school plans to review the study skills element to give greater focus to personal, learning and thinking skills.

- The range and quality of the school's extra-curricular provision is outstanding. Uptake is high. It aims to extend the learning done in lessons, broaden experience and ensure students enjoy themselves. In these it succeeds.
- There are excellent arrangements in place to ensure continuity of curriculum provision when the students enter and leave the school.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- There have been significant changes in the overall leadership and management of the school over the last year, resulting in a lack of continuity in the oversight of the curriculum. Management structures are now settled and plans are well advanced to ensure stability in curriculum leadership.
- Priorities in the plans for the January curriculum review are appropriate and the time scales clearly defined. They are based on an accurate understanding of what the school needs to do to make the most of the changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Subject leaders and teachers are well informed about these changes and have been assiduous in their attendance at training events. There are differing views about the effectiveness of such training for the foundation subjects.
- Excellent practice was seen at departmental level in developing students' ability to use their learning skills flexibly and well across subjects.
- Governors are well informed and have played a full part in devising the plans for the curriculum review.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is outstanding.

- Vulnerable students, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational needs are well integrated into the life of the school and match or outdo their peers in their accomplishments.
- The curriculum in place now is accessible to all students and inclusion remains a priority in the plans for the whole school review.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving students' understanding of the coherence of their learning by making connections between subjects and with the richness of their extra-curricular experiences
- defining the criteria against which curriculum changes will be evaluated.

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