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Mr T Gilson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gilson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Chris Constantine HMI on 19 November 2008 to look at work in CPD.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of CPD the visit had a particular focus on how professional development activities impact on raising standards and achievement.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgement about the overall effectiveness of CPD included interviews with senior managers, staff and the chair of governors, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of CPD was judged to be outstanding.

The strengths identified

- There is an outstanding commitment to the professional development of all the staff in the school to ensure that they are fully equipped with the essential skills required to continue to raise standards of attainment and achievement. I note that the provisional results in 2008 for A levels or equivalent Level 3 qualifications and GCSE 5 A* - C have continued to improve and remain significantly above the national average. Such results are a fitting tribute to the school's insightful and imaginative leadership coupled with its strong culture of high expectations.

- The school's commendable vision for CPD, together with your clarity of purpose and relentless drive to ensure the students receive the best education possible, is ensuring that high quality professional development successfully permeates all relevant aspects of school life. The way in which the staff and the chair of governors articulated the school's approach to CPD was remarkably consistent; without exception all spoke with refreshing honesty about the quality of training on offer and how it had helped them grow professionally. The lessons observed showed that there was a good link between whole school training and improved teaching and learning.
- Over the years you have capitalised successfully on your specialist status to ensure that Malmesbury develops into a genuine professional learning community where the culture of sharing best practice is firmly established both within and outside of the school. I note that many staff contribute to a range of regional training programmes and the school is at the forefront for its outstanding work on developing thinking skills. Such innovation is not only providing your staff with excellent career opportunities but has also enabled them to embrace the recent national changes to the curriculum with great confidence and understanding.
- The CPD programme is planned carefully to meet the school's changing needs and it is also flexible enough to accommodate an impressive range of training opportunities for staff which encompass teaching and learning, family support and extended services, and business and administration.
- Individual staff have a very clear picture of how they have been rapidly developed as teachers, managers and trainers of others and they spoke perceptively about the high reputation the school enjoys for CPD. Many are speedily promoted to internal and external posts in large part because of the high quality CPD they receive.
- The school's recruitment procedures are exceptionally rigorous and ensure that staff with potential for development are always appointed; these include personnel from industrial backgrounds who have greatly enhanced the quality of the school's provision. CPD plays an important role in staff retention; staff turn over is low because the school places a high importance on their well-being and enjoyment at work.
- A significant number of staff have in the past, or still are, engaged on a range of accredited courses leading to further qualifications, for example the Masters programme, the National Professional Qualification for Headship, Leading from the middle, the National Programme for Specialist Leaders of Behaviour and Attendance and National Vocational Qualifications. This is a fitting testament to the school's commitment to encourage all, including support and administration staff, to become leaders of learning in their own right in order to drive improvement.
- The induction procedures for new staff including Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are commendable and enable them to hit the ground running when they take up post. The training programme for NQTs is tailored sensibly to meet their needs and good use is being made of local partnerships and consultants.
- Succession planning is outstanding as a result of the school's forward thinking approach to CPD and its willingness to invest wisely in middle leadership courses and more recently two secondments at a senior level.

There is real strength in the depth of essential training, coaching and mentoring skills both at the most senior level and within the faculties. The sensible shadowing opportunities in important elements of the school's work facilitate a smooth transition for staff assuming new roles. The school's skilful approach to workforce reform has been instrumental in achieving this.

- There is a strong link between CPD, performance management and the impressive school improvement and faculty plans. The performance management system is used well to identify targets, for example, in teaching and learning. This is documented clearly in performance management records which show how CPD relates to individual, faculty and whole school targets. In discussions the staff were very clear about these links.
- The management and coordination of CPD are excellent and the systems for monitoring the quality of CPD are rigorous and used consistently. All documentation is of a high quality. The school's evaluation of the cost effectiveness and impact of CPD activities on improved provision is also excellent. That said, we agreed that the school's long term evaluation of the impact of CPD on improved outcomes for students could be a little sharper in some key documents.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sharpen the school's long term evaluation of CPD in relation to improved outcomes for students.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop CPD 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

Mary Harlow
Her Majesty's Inspector