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Mr Callaghan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Callaghan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – physical education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 and 02 December 2008 to look at work in physical education (PE).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on assessing the PE contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM), particularly 'being healthy'.

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 schools but the individual schools 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 the impact of the specialist sports status, interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of documentation and five lesson observations.

The overall effectiveness of physical education was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good because students reach high standards from average starting points.

- In 2008, a higher than average number of students reached level five or better by the end of Year 9 and 98% gained an A* to C in GCSE PE. All students passed the BTEC Sport course and 79% of students gained an A* to C in GCSE Dance, although the class sizes were small. A high proportion gained an A* or A in GCSE PE and Dance, but more students are capable of achieving the higher levels by the end of Year 9 and in the BTEC. Observations confirm high standards and good progress for all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

- The school competes successfully in a range of sports and some students represent the county and their country, while others 'turn professional'.
- The foundation for students' outstanding personal development through PE is the excellent relationships staff cultivate with students. As a result students enjoy and achieve highly and their attitudes to learning and behaviour are very good. They develop confidence, independence and evaluative skills. Students' progress against the four core strands of the PE National Curriculum is good.
- The department celebrate students' success well through the 'wall of fame', positive feedback and rewards system.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

Teaching is good and promotes effective learning.

- Good staff subject knowledge; enthusiastic and highly focused learning approaches; good support and guidance; and high staff expectations underpin the effective learning that takes place. Lessons are challenging, move at pace and enable students to think and act creatively. Students perform a range of roles, including planner, performer, mentor or official. These all combine to promote high levels of engagement.
- This is complemented by regular opportunities to observe, evaluate and improve their own and others practice. This deepens students' understanding and consolidates their learning. Frequent positive reinforcement encourages risk taking, while regular lesson monitoring and evaluation feeds a cycle of improvement.
- Assessment practice is sound. An initial appraisal of students' core skills during Year 7, followed by regular review helps staff to set, and track progress towards their targets. Level descriptors are decoded and shared with students, so that they know what is expected of them and can self assess their progress. Parents receive clear feedback on students' attainment, effort, and conduct and can discuss their child's progress with staff.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall but is not as balanced as it could be at Key Stage 3, particularly for boys.

- Students receive two hours of PE a week. They enjoy and achieve highly in the courses offered. Schemes of work are largely suitable; students' opinions are sought and help to shape the evolving programme. Particular strengths of provision include the development of students' performance, confidence, understanding and creativity.
- Provision at Key Stage 4 is inclusive and tailored to suit the full range of students' needs and interests. There is a good range of vocational, aesthetic and academic routes offered. In addition students take national governing body awards in officiating and coaching or the departments own 'Key Leaders' programme. Themed sports days and cross curricular work between PE, geography and French further enhance provision, as does the extensive extra-curricular programme.

- Gifted and talented students benefit from the 'Junior Athlete Education' programme. Vulnerable students are supported by the schools 'Foundation' programme which gives additional support and guidance, including taking up to three years to complete GCSE PE.
- The work of the school sport coordinator is enhancing the schools relationship with its partner primary schools and promoting more effective transition. The department has cultivated some strong links with local and regional providers of sport, who provide opportunities for students to continue participation in sport once they leave school. A good range of PE accommodation and resources support curriculum delivery effectively.
- The range and content of Key Stage 3 provision, particularly for boys is heavily weighted towards games activities at the expense of more aesthetic options like gymnastics and dance. In addition the length of some athletics, health related fitness and outdoor and adventurous activities units are too short to promote continuity and progression in students' learning. Other anomalies include no dance provision in Year 7 or 8 and yet it is available as a GCSE option.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management is good and PE has a high profile.

- The impact of specialist sport status has been significant and acted as a catalyst for improvement in many aspects of PE provision.
- Leaders and managers collaborate effectively and strategic planning, delivery and evaluation are good overall. As a consequence the department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, students enjoy and achieve highly, and PE is widening its sphere of influence across the school. For example, a number of PE inspired initiatives are becoming embedded across the whole school. Some of the documentation does require updating.
- The department has not become complacent with its recent success and strives to improve further. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum has been reorganised to widen students' options and better provide for the needs of more and less able students. This is raising standards and enhancing students' experience and perceptions of PE.
- Staff receive good guidance and benefit from focused training. They are held to account for the quality of their work through regular monitoring and performance management.
- Based on the improvements secured to date there is good capacity to improve further.

Subject issue - PE contribution to the outcomes of ECM, particularly 'being healthy'

- PE makes a good contribution to ECM outcomes, particularly in the way it promotes safe practice, key skills such as team working and enjoyment and achievement among students. Sportmark and Healthy School accreditation demonstrate the schools' commitment to raising students' awareness of, and participation in active and healthy lifestyles. Standards of physical fitness are high overall. In order to encourage students not attracted to exercise by traditional sports the

department has trialled a range of activities to capture students' imagination, including Tai chi, Fencing, Boxercise and Boccia.

- Students make a positive contribution to the school community by representing the school in fixtures and events and acting as young leaders. Importantly, students can experience a range of sport related jobs because of wide ranging work experience options.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the content and range of provision at Key Stage 3, particularly for boys
- ensuring units of work always promote continuity and progression in students' learning, particularly for non-games based activities
- raising the proportion of students that attain the higher grades and levels by the end of Year 9 and in BTEC Sport.

I hope these observations are useful as you work to develop PE 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

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector