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Mr B Goddard
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Dear Mr Goddard

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 Wednesday 28 January 2009 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 school has been involved in significant changes in its Key Stage 5 curriculum and so postponed the implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum until September 2009. Consequently, the overall effectiveness of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 are above average. Students' achievement in lessons is satisfactory but the impact of the new curriculum on students' achievement is inadequate.

- The quality of work seen in books show students are making satisfactory progress. They report that they are learning new skills although some repetition of Year 6 work takes place.
- Year 7 students' behaviour is good and their attitudes to learning are excellent. Students are articulate and engage well in group and paired work. They are able to consider and respond to ideas thoughtfully,

although they do not always build upon each others' responses. This is because in some lessons teachers direct the learning in ways which do not always allow for students to be independent in their learning or to develop their enquiry skills.

- When Year 7 students join the school they are placed in mixed age form groups with Year 8. This they find very helpful in ensuring they make friends with older students and have someone to advise them if they do not wish to talk to an adult. Students are very positive about the very wide variety of clubs. Participation in extra-curricular activities is high.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in Year 7 is satisfactory. However, the impact of the new curriculum on teaching and learning is inadequate.

- Relationships between students and teachers are very positive. Students feel they are able to approach staff for help when they need it. Teachers structure their lessons well and make good use of resources. In the best lessons observed students made rapid progress because teachers planned activities that challenged them and ensured all were actively engaged. Learning was not as good when lessons were overly led by teachers. In these instances students become passive and sometimes disengaged. Although standards for higher attaining students are rising, teachers' planning does not fully challenge them in lessons.
- Students are aware of their targets. Most know what the National Curriculum levels mean and what they need to do to improve. Although some teachers provide good guidance to students this is not embedded across the work of the school. Marking is inconsistent and too often celebratory rather than giving students precise areas in which to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- Although some subject leaders have attended training on the changes in the new curriculum, this has yet to impact widely in teachers' planning and in lessons.
- A few teachers have piloted units of work which reflect changes in the new curriculum. However, the majority of teachers are not familiar with the specific requirements, such as the personal, learning, thinking and functional skills. Consequently, they have not incorporated these into their planning.
- Students spoke enthusiastically about creative learning opportunities such as the mock Battle of Hastings in history. However, these are not a regular part of their experience and opportunities for them to be excited about learning are limited.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- Senior leaders are reviewing the curriculum across the whole school and have pragmatically prioritised curriculum developments in Key Stages 4 and 5.
- Senior leaders are ambitious for their students and are taking steps to improve the presently satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3, particularly for the higher attaining students.
- A clear plan for implementation of the new curriculum exists; this includes the involvement of governors and middle leaders as well as students. Time has also been dedicated to enable middle leaders to work with their teams.
- Middle leaders are informed about the changes in Key Stage 3 and have started to review schemes of work. They are enthusiastic about the opportunities presented by the new curriculum, particularly in relation to planning for more creativity and making learning more meaningful for students. However, they express concerns about how the considerable changes to the curriculum can be made manageable.
- Middle leaders welcome opportunities for greater collaboration between different subjects and have already instigated some cross-curricular collaboration, such as between modern foreign languages and English.

Inclusion

The impact of the new curriculum on inclusion is satisfactory.

- Transition arrangements have focussed on exploring links between the primary and secondary curriculum. This has given teachers valuable information on the prior learning of students and is enabling them to revise schemes of work to minimise repetition of work. Although this work is already having an impact by raising teachers' expectation, it is at an early stage.
- Support for vulnerable students is good. This includes additional literacy and numeracy lessons. A strength of this support in numeracy is the close alignment of schemes of work. This has enabled teachers to pre-teach units of work in support classes enabling students to access mainstream mathematics lesson with increased confidence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum in order to raise achievement
- ensuring teaching challenges and engages all students, particularly higher attaining students, and develops their independence in learning
- ensuring middle leaders are supported in implementing the new curriculum in a way which promotes coherent and engaging learning experiences for all students.

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

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector