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Mr D Fox
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Dear Mr Fox

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 March 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 overall effectiveness of the planning for and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 are below 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 students in lessons and in their books is satisfactory.

- Students are polite and work well together in lessons and are quick to support each other. Their behaviour in lessons is good. However, outside lessons they are sometimes less considerate.
- During classroom discussions teachers are not fully developing students' speaking and listening skills so they do not actively listen and build upon the responses of their peers. Opportunities to develop

personal, learning and thinking skills enabled by the new curriculum have not been incorporated in to subject areas.

- Although students report they are learning new things, the higher attaining students sometimes have work that does not challenge them.
- Students enjoy the many clubs on offer and take an active part in them. They were enthusiastic about the trips which were a result of collaboration between subjects and would welcome more opportunities to learn outside the classroom.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers create a positive environment where learning can take place. They have good subject knowledge and relationships between students and teachers are good.
- In the best lessons, teachers plan lessons and structure learning ensuring all students are involved and working at a good pace. Students are given opportunities to work in pairs and assess each others' work, although this practice is not consistent across subjects.
- Where learning is not as successful, teachers overly lead lessons and do not ensure everyone has understood before moving learning on.
- Although not fully established across all subjects, very good examples of formative marking were seen, particularly in English. However, it is not always clear that students act on teachers' helpful guidance.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- Fledgling collaborations between subjects which result in learning outside the classroom have been instigated. Although teachers from different subjects have not had the opportunity to plan, teach or assess different skills together, visits to places of interest are beginning to be utilised to bring students' learning in different subjects together.
- Functional skills are being specifically addressed in English and mathematics. However, they have not been incorporated into schemes of work in other subjects. Consequently, students are not explicitly utilising their skills across the curriculum.
- Personal, learning and thinking skills have not been considered in a systematic way to identify where students' skills are weaker and subsequently addressed across the Year 7 curriculum.

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 have not established a central system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the new curriculum. This means that inconsistency in practice across subjects and in the implementation of key features of the new curriculum have not been

addressed. A strategic approach to collaboration between subjects is not in place.

- Middle leaders are well informed, enthusiastic and welcome the opportunities afforded by the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. However, these opportunities have not been fully utilised. For example, personal, learning and thinking skills have not been developed, and functional skills are not addressed across the curriculum.
- Schemes of work have been reviewed in all subjects and some subjects have begun to evaluate their new schemes of work to inform further development.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- Very effective use is made of Year 11 prefects to support the induction of new Year 7 students. The prefects provide good care and guidance to Year 7 and are outstanding role models.
- Teaching assistants provide good support in lessons to individual students, ensuring they are able to access the curriculum.
- Additional induction for vulnerable students provides them with opportunities to visit the school, experience taster lessons and meet the prefects. The impact of this has been a smooth focussed start for Year 7 students.
- Form tutors are active in promoting the learning of students. This includes observing students who are experiencing difficulties in lessons and providing feedback to parents on ways forward.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing rigour in monitoring and evaluating at all levels to ensure consistency in practice across subjects in Year 7
- ensuring teaching challenges the most able and builds on the skills they already have
- utilising the opportunities offered by the new curriculum to enable more effective cross-curricular working, including embedding functional and personal, learning and thinking skills.

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