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Mr J King
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Dear Mr King

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 Tuesday 27 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 ten 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 were around the national 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 good.

- Exercise books and other work also demonstrate that students are making good progress.
- The new curriculum is making a good contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Students enjoy school and have

positive attitudes to learning. Attendance levels in Year 7 have risen significantly this year.

- Students participate enthusiastically in the wide range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities that the school provides.
- Behaviour in lessons seen during the inspection was good. However, students spoken to reported that a few individuals disrupt some lessons and that this affects their learning and enjoyment.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- The school has introduced a common format for lesson planning which has improved its consistency and quality. As a result, most lessons are very well planned and include a wide range of interesting activities. However, in some cases, teachers lack the skills and confidence necessary to implement these improved arrangements effectively.
- The pace of learning in lessons is brisk. This helps to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged.
- In many cases, teachers make too little use of open questions to provoke students' thinking and widen discussion.
- Leaders have worked to improve the way in which teachers use assessment in their lessons to help students to learn and make progress. This is having a positive impact: students say that it is helping them to understand what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the new curriculum is good.

- The school has created three learning pathways in Year 7. This is helping the most able students, and those at risk of underachievement, to make greater progress.
- The majority of departments have made good use of the opportunities provided by the new curriculum and there is some very imaginative curriculum planning within many subjects. This is helping to support Year 7 students' good achievement and enjoyment.
- The school's specialist status as a sports college is a significant strength. Physical education (PE) teachers are modelling good practice in teaching and learning, and the PE department is providing support for the introduction of the new curriculum across the school.
- English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons provide good support for the development of students' functional skills.
- A good start has been made in planning for the development of students' personal learning and thinking skills. Opportunities are identified in schemes of work and lesson plans. However, these are not always translated into actual opportunities for students to develop these skills within the lesson. Additionally, students' development of skills over time is not systematically planned for or assessed.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- The introduction of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum has been carefully considered, meticulously planned and well led.
- Senior leaders have explicitly used the new curriculum as an opportunity to make teaching and learning more interesting, active and varied for students.
- Middle leaders understand the aims of the new curriculum and are enthusiastic about it. They have made good use of the opportunities that the curriculum provides to improve the quality of lessons.
- The school has made good use of the wide range of very useful training, support and advice that the local authority has provided.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- All students were seen to be making good progress in the lessons observed.
- Lessons are becoming more active and varied, and this is contributing to the inclusion of all students.
- The introduction of discrete curriculum pathways is having a positive impact on the progress of the most able students and those at risk of underachievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- undertaking further planning to ensure that the curriculum supports the development of students' personal learning and thinking skills
- ensuring that all teachers have the skills and confidence necessary to implement the new schemes of work and lesson plans effectively.

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

Chris Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector