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Mr P Cook  
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Dear Mr Cook

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 02 February 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 six 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

Students enter the school with broadly average standards. Their achievement is satisfactory.

- Students in Year 7 have not yet been exposed to extensive changes in their curriculum, so it is too early for any wholesale impact on standards to be evident. Most of the changes planned in Key Stage 3 have yet to be fully implemented.
- Aspects of students' performances appear to reflect specific initiatives. Some staff, for instance, make good use of independent or collaborative work, others give new prominence to choice and most

promote active participation well. All of these changes gain a positive response from students so that enjoyment, attendance and eagerness to learn show improvement.

- The English faculty has used Key Stage 3 changes to build a new link with the Enhanced Learning Faculty. This is giving additional, systematic support for students with learning difficulties in literacy. Their progress over a relatively short period has been good.
- A good impact on personal development has been made by various developments. Fresh approaches to teaching encourage better learning, and in addition, off-timetable days or "Impact Days" are effective. These occupy five days each year and focus on personal and social issues. They help to deliver the new Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE) requirements and aspects of personal and financial well-being.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Recent changes to teaching and learning styles have yet to have a full impact on achievement, which remains satisfactory.
- Teachers plan well and consequently they have been able to introduce considerably more flexibility into lessons without loss of structure and pace.
- A feature of most lessons seen was full, active participation by students. History research involved students constantly circulating in class to find sources for their task; science required all to come out to be measured; other lessons involved students coming out to the front to read aloud or to annotate work on the screen.
- Teaching is promoting more choice and creativity. Physical education (PE), for example, does this at two levels: students nominate whole areas of activity, such as skateboarding and Frisbee, while in specific tasks, staff give students options about how to interpret and which skills to pursue. Non-participation in PE has shrunk to a fraction of its previous scale. Mathematics lessons also provide tasks explicitly capable of different solutions and students again respond well to this freedom.
- All lessons seen made very valuable use of assessment. From the outset, level descriptions had a central place and students were required to evaluate their own work and that of others against the criteria. This they did with skill and maturity.
- Personal and academic progress is tracked well, using established systems. The growing confidence of staff and students in applying assessment criteria reliably serves to strengthen the tracking process further.

### Quality of the curriculum

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

- There are some good features in the changing Key Stage 3 curriculum, but the school is right to recognise that a considerable amount of planning and implementation still needs to be done.
- The school has other, urgent priorities so that Key Stage 3 changes have not had pride of place. Extensive action is required to complete the redesigning of Schemes of Work, building in the personal learning and thinking skills across subjects, weaving in functional skills provision and exploiting the scope for cross-subject projects. A comprehensive audit of needs and rigorous evaluation mechanisms are required.
- Where changes have taken place, they have been successful. Year 7 provision shows a widespread adoption of strategies to promote creativity, independent work, physically active participation in lessons and extensive opportunities to promote an understanding of assessment.
- The use of "Impact Days" pre-dates the new Key Stage 3 requirements, but has proved a useful vehicle for delivering some of them. Similarly, the mathematics department's use of every third lesson for enrichment and a degree of experimentation has been in place for several years, but its value has increased significantly in the current context.
- Transition from primary school complements Key Stage 3 provision well. Many staff visit primary schools to teach or assess incoming students and they have some influence on the Year 5 and 6 curriculum. They also adopt features they find useful into Year 7 provision. There is very good attendance at summer schools for Year 6 leavers, further preparing them for life in Year 7.
- Student surveys and staff observations confirm that where the introduction of Key Stage 3 initiatives has taken place, learners' interests, enjoyment and scope for creativity have improved significantly

### Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- All aspects of the new requirements implemented so far have been handled well. Planning has been secure, with a preference for quality over quantity. Leadership and management of the school's overall concerns has understandably placed a higher priority on Key Stage 4 standards and the management of 14-19 responsibilities, shared with other providers. Thus the implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is only partially complete.
- Initial planning was good, with good local authority support and effective feeding back to colleagues. Whole-school leadership and some subject leaders benefited from such training.
- The school has a clear overview of Key Stage 3 and good outline plans. Its understanding of the new requirements is good.
- Several middle leaders have made quite rapid progress in revising schemes of work. The science faculty has chosen to work with other schools to plan for the full three years' material rather than work alone and implement units as they are finished.

## Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is satisfactory.

- There remains much to be implemented so that impact is limited.
- Where specific, focussed changes affect inclusion, the impact has been good. Primarily, this stems from good additional support from the English and Enhanced Learning faculties for students with literacy issues.
- More widely, the changes to classroom strategies of active participation, flexibility and self assessment have helped vulnerable students become more involved and more confident as learners.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- completing the systematic revision of all schemes of work, building in all the new skills
- creating more cross-subject topics
- setting up a system to evaluate all the new developments in the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

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

Bob Drew  
Additional Inspector