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28 January 2009

Mrs E Gleeson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gleeson

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 four 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 Year 7 are well above 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.

- In the national tests at the end of Year 9 standards are consistently well above average and they improved further in 2008. Achievement was good overall and outstanding in mathematics.

- Students meet or exceed the very challenging targets set for them by the school. There are robust systems for tracking students' achievement.
- Students enjoy their learning and the many opportunities for participating in clubs and societies. They are rightly proud of the high standard of personal and academic education at the school.
- Attendance is excellent and behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- Students report that the arrangements for transition from primary school were effective.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Lessons typically present the students with a demanding level of challenge. They respond positively to this because consistently good teaching provides them with support to reach their goals.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Their enthusiasm for their subjects and care for their students create a superb learning environment.
- Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives. Students appreciate the variety of appropriate activities and the way in which they are involved in their learning. Although questioning is probing and incisive, it does not always ensure that all students are involved when the whole class are working together.
- A good range of assessment activities is used in lessons to encourage the students to reflect on their learning and how to improve their standards. The students are very skilled at evaluating the quality of their own work. However, marking does not consistently inform the students what they have done well and what they should do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The new curriculum builds on the previous model well. The students find the curriculum interesting and enjoyable.
- The curriculum is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the students.
- Reduction in the content of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 has enabled subject leaders to rearrange the content of their schemes of work across the whole school to match the high attainment of the pupils. It has also had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and the variety of learning activities in classroom.
- The school has taken the opportunity to review the wide range of trips and visitors to the school, ensuring that they create productive links between subjects and improve the knowledge and skills of the students.
- Specialist status in mathematics and computing makes an excellent contribution to the new curriculum.

- In some subjects the quality of planning for and implementing the new curriculum is outstanding, but this is not consistent across the school.
- Although personal learning and thinking skills are taught well within subjects, the school has not yet conducted an audit to ensure that they are fully covered and to maximise the benefits of linking them across the curriculum. Training in this aspect of provision is planned to take place soon.
- The coverage of functional skills is more advanced. For example, the teaching of skills and concepts in mathematics is increasingly aligned with other subjects such as science.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

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

- Senior leaders have used external training well to understand the new curriculum and to consider the implications for the school. They have provided a good programme of training in the school and time for teachers to meet the new requirements.
- Those middle leaders who attended external training events for the new curriculum spoke highly of their quality. There are some excellent examples of implementing the changes in the school, but some subjects are well ahead of others. Overall, subjects are well prepared and have a clear line of direction for further developments.
- The school is aware that the next area for development is the provision for the cross-curricular elements of the new curriculum. There are well-conceived plans to do this.
- Senior and middle leaders are monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the new curriculum well, but this would benefit from a more formal and frequent approach.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is outstanding.

- The level of challenge and support is excellent, allowing all students to make progress which is at least good and in many cases outstanding.
- The caring ethos of the school and the rigorous tracking of individuals ensure that those with learning difficulties or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all subject leaders make the same rate of progress in implementing the changes as the best in the school
- conducting an audit of the provision for 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

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector