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Mr J McAtear  
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Dear Mr McAtear

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 Monday 26 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 12 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 curriculum is making a good contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Year 7 students enjoy school; they behave very well and have extremely positive attitudes to school and

to learning. There has been a significant increase in Year 7 attendance levels this year.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers manage classrooms well to create a calm and very positive environment for learning.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Teaching of subject information, skills and understanding is rigorous.
- The vast majority of lessons are varied and interesting: these lessons include opportunities for students to work individually, in pairs and in groups, and to undertake a wide range of different activities. A few lessons lack sufficient variety to engage and interest students.
- In some lessons students receive detailed written and oral feedback which provides them with clear guidance about how to improve their work. However, this is not the case in all lessons.

### Quality of the curriculum

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

- In most subjects, good use has been made of the new curriculum to develop schemes of work and new teaching approaches. However, this is not yet the case in all subjects.
- Curriculum enrichment makes a powerful contribution to students' enjoyment of school and their personal development. The range of lunchtime and after school opportunities is very broad; students also enjoy a variety of other opportunities, such as a number of overseas trips.
- Key literacy and numeracy skills are well taught within mathematics and English lessons.
- The curriculum provides a range of opportunities for students to develop wider learning and thinking skills. However, these opportunities have not been systematically planned for within the curriculum.
- The school's specialist status as a sports college makes a strong contribution to the curriculum. Students appreciate the range of opportunities in sport and physical education, both within and outside of lessons.

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

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

- The achievement of individuals and groups of students is closely tracked. This information is carefully analysed to check that the curriculum meets the needs of all students.
- Decisions about curriculum development are firmly based on the school's analysis of students' needs.

- Middle leaders have a good understanding of the opportunities offered by the changes to the national curriculum. Most are making good use of these opportunities to improve provision in their subject areas. However, this is not the case in a few subject areas, where developments have been slower.
- Leaders have made good use of external training and support to support the introduction of the new curriculum.

## Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- All students were seen to be making good progress in the lessons observed.
- The school tracks the achievement of all groups very carefully to ensure that all are able to meet challenging targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- planning more systematically to ensure that the curriculum supports the development of students' personal learning and thinking skills
- ensuring that all subject areas make full use of the opportunities provided by the new curriculum to develop schemes of work and teaching approaches.

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