

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



02 February 2009

Mrs H Mullaney
Headteacher
The Heath School
Clifton Road
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 4SY

Dear Mrs Mullaney

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 January 2009 to look at work in promoting equality. Please convey my thanks to the students who showed me round the school during my visit.

The visit provided valuable information that 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included discussions with key members of staff, students, parents, a carer, governors, key partners and the observation of parts of six lessons.

The quality of provision to promote equalities is outstanding.

Features of good practice observed

- The school has an embedded culture of inclusion. This is evident when talking to staff, students and parents. All of those spoken to talked about how the school recognises the value of each individual and is prepared to go the extra mile to ensure they get the best possible deal. The feeling of being valued is tangible to students whose views are echoed by those who said, "My tutor is more like a friend than a teacher" and "They are always there for you." Relationships between the students and staff are excellent and this provides a solid basis from which the needs of students can be ascertained and then met.

- There are very good arrangements for identifying the needs of vulnerable students even before they arrive at the school. Staff make strenuous efforts to get to know about them in their primary schools and then, using a battery of useful questionnaires and assessments, they thoroughly assess their needs when they arrive at the school. All this puts the staff in a good position to get off to a good start in meeting the students' needs. These arrangements are supplemented by an early meeting with parents and carers of vulnerable students late in the summer term before they start at the school. This sets in train good relationships with parents who develop confidence in the school. Regular monitoring and tracking of the students and the interventions provided for them enables the school to respond by adjusting the interventions, where necessary, so that they continue to meet the student's needs.
- Leadership and management of the provision for vulnerable students are outstanding. The school's inclusion team is very well trained and qualified and together they provide a wide array of expertise and experience which gives the school an excellent capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable students. Roles and responsibilities are clear. The team is highly regarded in the school and its contributions include high quality interventions with students and influencing the work of other staff. Communication within the team and from the team is good and their deployment is well organised. The school also draws on other professionals very well to meet the students' needs.
- The fourteen students interviewed were all extremely positive about the school and what it had done for them. They were able to articulate how the school had conveyed a genuine interest in their difficulties and how staff had been very reliable in doing what they said they would do to meet their needs. This included direct work with students, advocating for students and working with their families.
- The personal development of vulnerable students is outstanding. Because the school works tirelessly at promoting their confidence and self-esteem the students are impressively aware of their problems and how they have overcome or are overcoming them.
- Students with specific learning difficulties are very well provided for. The school has trained staff so that the needs of these students can be identified early and effective interventions are delivered through a withdrawal programme as well as in-class support.
- Students with emotional difficulties have benefited by the work the school has done with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Staff's skills have been developed through different layers of training. Firstly, to raise awareness of the early signs of mental illness and to help students develop positive mental health and resilience. Secondly, staff have developed their knowledge of more specific disorders such as

depression, self-harming and anxiety problems. Thirdly, some staff have embarked on a Level 2, 15 credit course devised by CAMHS and John Moores University. The results of all this training have resulted in staff meeting the emotional needs of students more effectively and referrals to CAMHS reducing as a consequence, allowing CAMHS staff to focus on more complex cases.

- The range of interventions available to the school is impressive. These include support for children in care through weekly mentoring sessions and work that focuses on helping them achieve their academic targets. A grief education programme is underway with a small number of targeted students and the early signs are that the students are valuing the course and appreciating they are not alone in their grief. A stress management programme runs for Year 7 and Year 11 students and parents and students report the benefits of this to the students. Indeed a GP has also commended the school for this work with a student.
- The quality of teaching observed was consistently good. The vulnerable students in the lessons were well known to staff and the styles of teaching and relationships in the class ensured that these pupils were as engaged and enjoying the lessons as much as their peers. Praise was prominent in all the lessons.

Area for development

- To further the progress of vulnerable students in lessons encourage all teachers to include more specific objectives and outcomes for these pupils in their lesson plans.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to promote equalities in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Ofsted gathers information on the immediate and longer-term impact of survey inspections, both on the institutions themselves, and with a view to improving its own processes. To this end, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire and return it within the next ten days. We have also just sent a copy of the questionnaire by email. Please return your completed questionnaire to either the email or postal address on the form, not to me. We may also contact some schools by telephone after several months in order for us to gain a picture of longer-term impact. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Eric Craven
Her Majesty's Inspector