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Mrs C Myers
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Dear Mrs Myers

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) - three year longitudinal survey.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my final visit on 16 July 2008 to look at work on sustainability.

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. This is a follow up monitoring visit which is intended to assess the progress the school has made in developing sustainability throughout the school.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils including the Eco committee, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of a part lesson and the 'new build' environment during a walk around the school.

Ongoing delays with the new school build and the restrictions caused by parts of the school being a building site have constrained development and made it impossible to action some of the planned for environmental improvements. However, since the last visit, the girls' school has continued to make satisfactory progress towards developing aspects of sustainability in the school. The overall effectiveness continues to be satisfactory with some aspects being good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ESD are satisfactory.

- Many students are aware of the increasing emphasis on needing to lead more sustainable lives. They are exposed to issues linked to climate change, the energy crisis and food shortages through everyday media and news stories. This is reinforced in a number of subjects, notably the humanities.
- There is a small core of students who are more actively involved in promoting sustainability throughout the school. For example, members of the Eco committee are actively involved in devising an eco-action plan for the school which 'will make the school more eco-friendly and a better place for students'. These pupils have an excellent understanding of the need to reduce, recycle and reuse.
- Students with a strong commitment to sustainability are having an increasing impact on influencing behaviour change at home. These students spoke with pride and enthusiasm about how they had encouraged parents to recycle more efficiently and to reduce energy use. Their positive actions are beginning to have an impact on the wider school community.
- Students are aware of the need to recycle and to reduce litter. However, some individuals remain less committed than others. This issue was identified as an area that needs improving by the recent survey conducted by the Eco committee and has widespread support across the school.
- Sustainability engages students' interest and they see many of the issues as being relevant to their lives. As a result, many are prepared to spend longer on their work and go into greater depth because they find the work interesting.
- In those subjects such as geography, English, textiles and media where pupils have completed work linked to sustainability, teachers have identified higher quality outcomes, improved research skills and sharper analysis, even from students who may be more disaffected.
- Students understand the ethics of Fair Trade and are supportive of the products on sale in the school coffee shop for example. Their work in geography in Year 9 reflected a maturity of argument and produced some high quality persuasive writing. Equally, in textiles, students achieved some creative results in re-designing clothes using discarded or second hand garments.
- Students' attitudes are, on the whole, positive and there is a willingness and determination to improve the environment of the school. However, there is also a sense of frustration that improvements are very gradual and in greater need of more direct support from more staff.

Quality of teaching and learning of ESD

Insufficient ESD related lessons were observed to make a firm judgement on the quality of teaching and learning in ESD. Students identified that they particularly enjoy those lessons where sustainability is a focus because they perceive these as being more relevant and interesting. In these lessons there is a greater interaction between students with more opportunities for discussion.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum remains satisfactory with some aspects which are good.

- The school has completed an audit of where sustainability is being delivered through the curriculum. The school is aware of where this is being done well but also where it needs further development.
- Although students receive good opportunities to learn about sustainability in some subjects and some classes, currently there is not a cohesive whole school approach.
- Sustainability in the school is currently best supported through the humanities specialism. Geography, in particular, is leading in producing a curriculum which better meets the needs of students, addresses the new Key Stage 3 requirements and provides a more coherent programme which supports students learning about sustainability. The year 9 curriculum in particular is especially relevant and well developed.
- Other subjects such as textiles and English are also looking at developing their teaching programmes to incorporate more frequent opportunities to learn about sustainability.
- The wide range of visits and trips, including those abroad, helps raise awareness of issues linked to diversity, poverty, interdependence and equity and justice. For those who participate, these enrichment experiences develop students' understanding of their place in the wider world as well as of different cultures. For example, the visit to Auschwitz is a particularly moving experience for the older students.
- The frequent opportunities for students to celebrate their own cultural identities support community cohesion well.

Leadership and management of ESD

Leadership and management of ESD are improving and are now good.

- Senior management continues to support the drive to develop the school as a 'sustainable school'. The continued delays in building the new 'Learning Village' have slowed this process. When completed the

new school will be low carbon and will provide a first hand example of sustainability for the students.

- The 'Every Child Matters' agenda is central to the School Development Plan and this provides a good opportunity to raise the profile of sustainability. The intention is to make this more explicit in the revised planning for the new academic year.
- The school has been pro-active in identifying a person to co-ordinate sustainability across the school. This has also helped to raise the profile.
- The additional time made available has been useful in enabling the co-ordinator to begin to identify and manage provision across the school.
- The ESD action plan is aspirational and does identify a range of strategies to develop sustainability throughout the school. The focus is very much on greater pupil participation. However, it fails to identify training for staff to raise awareness and encourage greater whole school involvement and commitment.
- Currently, a small group of teachers, particularly from the humanities area, is actively involved in developing sustainability. The proposed restructuring of curriculum/faculty areas with a named person in each responsible for sustainability should enable a more cohesive whole school approach to be developed.
- The Eco committee continues to provide a small, very motivated group of students with opportunities to improve the environment of the school. The school council is less actively engaged in promoting sustainability.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- encouraging greater pupil participation and involvement by making this a part of the remit for the school council to engage it more actively in promoting sustainability around the school
- integrating the work of both the school council and eco-committee to enable a more co-ordinated and coherent approach to become established
- providing awareness raising and additional training for staff to develop a whole school ethos and cohesive approach
- providing more opportunities for pupils to become practically involved in improvements and decision making and making this integral to their learning. For example, by getting them to review and devise a new school travel plan as part of their work in geography
- utilising the opportunities provided by the need to review schemes of work at Key Stage 3 to encourage more subjects to identify new openings to teach about sustainability
- continuing to encourage wider pupil involvement in the Eco committee and other established projects linked to sustainability.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ESD 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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools
Specialist Adviser for Geography and ESD