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08 December 2009

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Dear Dame Dela

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: physical education (PE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 November 2009 to look at work in PE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the identification of an area of best practice in PE and its impact for students.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of extra-curricular activities and seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of physical education is satisfactory.

Achievement in PE

Achievement is satisfactory.

- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good in most lessons. Most students are committed to improving their performance and they work well in groups and pairs. A small minority of girls in Key Stage 4 do not participate regularly and limited curriculum time for students in Key Stage 4 restricts progress.

- Unvalidated results in GCSE and BTEC PE examination courses, taken by around one quarter of students, were above average in 2009 and current Year 11 students are on course to exceed challenging targets.
- Those with the opportunity to follow a leadership course develop good leadership skills and performance in games is a strength. Students' understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle is not secure for those who do not follow an accredited PE course.

Features of best practice

- Results in GCSE and BTEC have improved significantly this year as a result of well focused guidance to students when choosing the courses, close monitoring of their progress, focused mentoring, and assessment of a wider range of activities that reflects students' strengths.

Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers have positive relationships with students and high expectations of their conduct and performance. Lessons are well planned and structured so there are good levels of physical activity and a good pace to learning. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is secure. In most lessons, activities are matched well to students' different needs.
- Information and communication technology is used to support learning well in theory lessons but limited software restricts its use in supporting students' analysis of performance.
- Assessment systems are used most effectively in examination classes where students know how the lesson objectives relate to course criteria and what they must do to meet their targets. In core PE lessons, objectives are made clear to students but these are not often related to National Curriculum criteria. Consequently, students are less clear of what they must do to reach their targets. The department is developing assessment systems to reflect students' progress in more elements of the National Curriculum.

Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Key Stage 3 students experience at least two hours of high quality PE each week. The majority of students in Key Stage 4 do not have a similar experience because just one hour of curriculum time is allocated to PE. This is below the Government's expectation.
- The department is in the early stages of developing the new National Curriculum requirements in Key Stage 3. The Key Stage 4 core curriculum is expanding in response to students' interests, although the opportunity to gain a leadership qualification is limited mainly to those following accredited courses.

- A good range of accreditation is provided and includes GCSE and BTEC awards for PE and sport. A BTEC award in outdoor activities is successful in engaging a group of students at risk of losing interest in school. The experience of dance as part of BTEC Performing Arts is enhancing standards.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities is offered, supported well by the local school sport partnership.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- Leadership is clearly focused on raising standards and there is a strong commitment to improvement across the team. Good capacity to improve is demonstrated in the improved examination results, an expanding curriculum and the improving approaches to assessment.
- Self-evaluation identifies the correct strengths and priorities and the raising attainment plan for the subject is helping to drive improvement forward. Well-focused professional development has supported improvements.
- PE has a high profile within the school and has contributed to the improving positive ethos across the school. Many PE and sport-related events contribute to the positive community cohesion between the three schools in the federation of schools that share the same site.

Features of best practice

- The school's specialist status for performing arts is leading to greater involvement of students in dance activities. An annual Brazilian Festival for all Year 9 students is a highlight of the year. Professional dancers work with students and staff to produce a festival of dances that culminates in a town centre parade. The school 'buzzes' with activity for the week and students gain a great deal of satisfaction through their involvement in this successful event.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that more students in Years 10 and 11 have access to at least two hours of high quality PE and sport per week
- raising the level of girls' participation in high quality PE
- extending opportunities to develop leadership skills and accreditation to more students
- improving students' understanding of how exercise contributes to a healthy lifestyle by making more reference to this in core PE lessons
- improving systems for assessment so that progress is monitored in more strands of the National Curriculum and that students are aware of what they must do to reach their targets for PE

- using ICT more frequently to support analysis of performance.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop physical education 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

Gillian Salter-Smith
Additional Inspector