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Mrs C Haynes
Principal
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Dear Mrs Haynes

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 15 and 16 December 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 on 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 you, subject managers, teachers and two groups of students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PE is good.

Achievement in PE

Achievement is good.

- The majority of students make satisfactory progress and attain broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 3. Progress is accelerated in Key Stage 4 because students are set clear targets for improvement and the majority of them work hard to meet them. Standards in GCSE PE are above average. The proportion attaining A* to C grades fell slightly this year, in line with predictions. The proportion attaining A* to A grades is consistently well above national average. In the sixth form, the majority of students pursuing A-level sports studies meets the targets set for them.

- In lessons, more able boys and girls respond well to the high expectations of teachers. Those in lower attaining classes make less progress because teachers do not always plan activities matched to their level of basic skills. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive support from classroom assistants which helps them to integrate fully into lessons.
- Students' personal development through PE is very good. They behave well and talk enthusiastically about opportunities to visit other schools to play sport and the friendships they make in PE.

Features of best practice

- A volleyball club, formed by PE staff, has grown into a flourishing senior club based at the college with men's, women's and junior teams competing at national and international level. Teams from the college have played in nine national finals and the under-18 girls and boys' squad have represented England on five occasions in the World Schools Volleyball Championships. One of the outstanding elements of this provision is its coaching staff; four of them are PE teachers, one of whom is a former student. The club's community coach, an international player and a former student at the college also provides high-quality coaching for college teams. They generate exceptionally high standards of team performance and ensure that outstanding college players can continue to learn, participate and compete at national and international level as senior members of Tendring Volleyball Club. The college is the first school, nationally, to deliver the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence Programme (AASE). This year, nine students gained this National Vocational Qualification while continuing to improve their performance in volleyball.

Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers display good subject knowledge and set high expectations which help students to develop as players, coaches, leaders and officials. Relationships are strong and students thrive on the constant praise and support from their teachers. Students are well-versed in leading warm-ups and evaluating their own and others' performance when practising in small groups.
- Regular assessments ensure that students remain on track and know how well they are doing against the targets set for them. Some lessons in Key Stage 3 do not include easier tasks to ensure that lower attaining students, with limited ball-skills and low levels of fitness, feel fully engaged in learning at all times.

Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- All students receive two hours of PE each week, taught in single-gender groups and classes of similar abilities. Best use is made of limited facilities on the lower school site to develop students' understanding of games, gymnastics and athletics. Better facilities on the upper school site allow a broader range of indoor learning to take place, including dance. GCSE PE and dance are popular with students and A-level sports studies is well established in the sixth form.
- Some progress has been made in assimilating new curriculum guidance into existing plans. However, more needs to be done to achieve a better balance of tasks to promote students' understanding of processes in PE and the learning of skills in practical activities.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- Leaders and managers maintain high standards and a detailed action plan is in place to secure further improvements. Staff are good role-models and support each other by sharing their specialist knowledge and providing training for others. There is good capacity to make further improvements. A school sports coordinator is helping to forge partnerships and increase participation in sport in local primary schools. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and monitoring of students' progress is thorough. Leaders have rightly recognised that the introduction of new curriculum requirements provides an ideal opportunity to adapt lesson planning to meet the needs of lower attaining students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- striking a better balance of tasks to promote students' understanding of the processes in PE and tasks that allow students to acquire and consolidate skills by participating in practical activities
- checking that lesson plans include easier tasks to ensure that students with limited ball-skills and low levels of fitness, particularly those in Key Stage 3, are fully included in learning and achieve as well as others.

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

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector