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15 February 2010

Mr R Barr  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Barr

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 2 and 3 February 2010 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 you, the director of sport, the PE subject leader and a group of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PE is good.

Achievement in PE

Achievement in PE is good.

- Students make good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and attain standards that are above the national average. Standards are notably high in swimming lessons in both key stages; students have regular opportunities to play water polo and gain personal survival awards. In Key Stage 4, most students continue to make good progress in a range of games and fitness activities. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive excellent support from teaching assistants in practical lessons. Some less-able students and those who lack confidence

make less progress than others in games because tasks are too challenging for them and more-able students are allowed to dominate play.

- Standards in GCSE PE and GCSE dance are consistently well above national averages. The quality of performance in dance is outstanding. The small proportion of Year 12 and 13 students that study A-level dance attain high standards. Standards in A-level PE are much lower; not all students have sufficient prior learning to meet the demands of the course and some underachieve because their progress is not monitored rigorously.

### Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching in PE is good.

- Teachers set high expectations, enthuse about the subject and make learning enjoyable. In a volleyball lesson, very effective use of video technology alongside the court helped Year 10 girls to understand how to set the ball and when to use this shot in a game. Planning is not always matched to the different needs and abilities of all students and occasionally some are not sufficiently challenged to achieve their very best.
- Teachers share good relations with students, manage behaviour well and offer them good advice during group-work. Students are regularly required to evaluate how well they and others are doing. Teachers' thorough knowledge of GCSE and BTEC course requirements, and good use of resources have a direct impact on the high standards achieved. This good practice does not extend to the A-level course. Regular assessments throughout Key Stage 3 ensure that students progress well but these procedures do not extend fully into Years 10 and 11.

### Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the PE curriculum is good.

- All students receive two hours of PE each week. An additional half-hour in Year 7 ensures that they experience a wide range of activities. Excellent facilities are used well to provide a broad, balanced curriculum. This is complemented by a good enrichment programme enjoyed by an increasing numbers of students. Several team sports are played to a high level.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 can select to pursue a range of accredited awards. In the sixth-form, A-level PE, dance and higher level sports leadership are offered and students are timetabled for one hour of sports enrichment each week which helps to promote their personal development. A significant number of older students train to become sports leaders and assist in a range of sports festivals and events held in school, but not all of them have the opportunity to do so as part of their weekly programme of PE.

## Features of best practice

- The school makes best use of its swimming pool and specialist teachers to help students to gain National Governing Body awards. Over a number of years, students have achieved awards in life-saving, including the Bronze Medallion, and in the teaching of swimming, life-saving and water polo. Students with these awards provide support in swimming lessons for younger students who lack confidence in the water. Some students use their awards to gain employment in the local community as pool attendants, lifeguards and swimming coaches. This makes a significant contribution to their personal development and their future economic well-being.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is good.

- The subject leader, ably supported by the director of sport, leads the department well and shows a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and informs development planning. The team of staff ensures that for the majority of students, outcomes are good and overall standards are rising. Best practice is not yet fully shared to resolve some of the inconsistencies in teachers' planning and to raise standards in A-level PE.
- Specialist sports college status is having a significant impact in PE and sport. It has led to enhanced staffing, excellent new facilities, increased curriculum time and a wider range of accredited awards and opportunities to participate in sports enrichment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in A-level PE by:
  - ensuring that students are fully aware of the requirements and academic demands of the course
  - raising expectations of students in lessons and rigorously monitoring their progress on a regular basis
- improving the consistency of teaching by:
  - sharing best practice so that all lessons are sufficiently challenging
  - monitoring planning and observing lessons to check that the needs of students of different abilities and levels of confidence are met.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop PE in the school.

As I explained previously, 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