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Mr A Greaney
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Greaney

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 June 2010 to look at work in PSHE education.

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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. They understand what is meant by a balanced diet, although not all apply this to what they eat at lunchtime and breaks. They understand the benefits of exercise for physical and mental fitness, and many participate enthusiastically in the range of sporting activities provided.
- Students know how to resist peer-group pressure and most have had opportunities to practise this using role-play and drama techniques. They know about the different forms of bullying and where they can get help. Students learn how to manage risks and keep themselves safe. They know about building stable relationships and older students understand sexual health risks and the dangers of substance misuse, including smoking and alcohol.

- Older students have a good understanding of the world of work and the skills they will need for employability. They take part in well-organised, valuable work experience where they learn about working life first-hand. They are well prepared to make sensible decisions about the next stage of their education and NEET figures are relatively low. They understand basic economic concepts and their financial capability. Students in Years 7 and 8 are not so well prepared for the choices they must make in Year 9.
- Students are lively, polite and honest. They have positive attitudes to their Learning for Life lessons and recognise their relevance to their own lives. Behaviour in the lessons observed was outstanding.
- Students are developing good communication skills, although a few struggle to be articulate and audible when presenting their work. They treat adults and each other with respect, whatever their background, which leads to a very harmonious community. They are able to reflect and consider their own views but are not always given sufficient opportunity to have their views challenged.

Quality of teaching of PSHE education

The quality of teaching of PSHE education is good.

- Teachers set high expectations for learning and behaviour. Lessons are characterised by productive relationships, effective classroom management, and teachers acting as excellent role-models.
- Lessons are well planned and prepared and have clear learning objectives which are shared effectively with students.
- A good range of methods is used to engage students in their learning. However, there is some variability in the lessons taught by tutors where a more limited range of activities is used.
- Effective use is made of external agencies, such as theatre groups and the traffic police, to enhance and extend learning.
- Assessment is good. Students' progress is assessed using self-, peer-, and teacher-assessment, planned into every Learning for Life lesson.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the PSHE curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is coherent and meets the needs of students because it is planned around the Every Child Matters agenda. PSHE education is given sufficient time with one discrete lesson a week taught by tutors, and work across the curriculum using the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative, and the inclusion of personal learning and thinking skills.
- The inclusion of all students, regardless of their cultural background, ability or physical disability, is outstanding. Students with specific emotional well-being needs are identified and given effective additional support.

- PSHE education is supported and underpinned by the achievement of the Healthy Schools award which has focused the school on improving healthy eating and increasing exercise.
- The school's specialist status in the arts has had a positive impact on PSHE education because students are encouraged to be independent learners and to think 'outside the box'.
- Economic understanding is covered well through lessons on managing money which begin in Year 7. There is an excellent careers education and guidance programme, including work-experience placements from Year 9. As a result, students feel well-prepared for the next stage of their education and have sensible ideas about what they want to achieve in the future. However, there is no planned programme of careers education in Years 7 and 8 to help students prepare for their option choices in Year 9.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

The leadership and management of PSHE education are outstanding.

- There is a high level of support from the senior management team who recognise the importance of PSHE education and its impact on learning. Dramatic progress has been made in past few years with the introduction of the Learning for Life lessons and better careers education and guidance.
- Subject leaders have a clear vision to develop PSHE provision, working alongside other departments in the school. A whole-school PSHE policy has been developed and shared with all tutors and an audit of provision, including cross-curricular work, has taken place. High quality monitoring and evaluation carried out by the PSHE education leader have been effective in raising achievement.
- Although the leaders of PSHE education and careers are well qualified and there has been whole-school SEAL training, tutors have not had sufficient training in the use of different methods of teaching PSHE education.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the curriculum for careers education in Years 7 and 8
- ensuring consistency in teaching by providing more specialist training for tutors in using different techniques.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop PSHE education 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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector