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Miss V Squirrel
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Squirrel

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 5 and 6 July 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four 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 live a healthy and safe life. They know what makes a healthy diet but are less sure about the function of vitamins, minerals and fibre.
- Students understand the need for exercise to remain healthy and they take advantage of the range of physical and sporting opportunities available, although facilities are limited. Extra-curricular sporting activities are well attended and students thoroughly enjoyed a curriculum extension day about different ways of dealing with stress.
- Students have a secure understanding of sex and relationships education and a good knowledge and understanding about the physical and social effects of drugs, including nicotine and alcohol.

- All students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress in these areas. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds are included very well and make good progress.
- Students are able to identify and discuss the importance of a variety of social and personal relationships and how these impact on their lives, especially through work in religious education and drama. They have practised resisting peer-group pressure using drama techniques.
- Students have a sound knowledge of basic economic concepts, such as profit, credit and debt. They have good opportunities to put their skills into practice by running their own fundraising activities, businesses and enterprises on curriculum extension days. They have good careers education, know their Connexions adviser and feel they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Personal development is outstanding; students are highly articulate, open and self-confident with positive attitudes towards their learning in PSHE education. They appreciate the opportunities they are given to express their own views and debate and discuss. They feel they are listened to and taken seriously. They appreciate the opportunities for reflection and meditation which come through the retreats that are provided.

Quality of teaching of PSHE education

The quality of teaching of PSHE education is good.

- Teachers set high expectations for learning and behaviour. They have good subject knowledge of their own areas, for example, in food and nutrition and in English, but confidence and expertise to teach PSHE education is more variable.
- Lessons are generally planned well. However, they do not always have specific learning objectives for PSHE education.
- The quality of classroom teaching is good. Lessons are characterised by positive relationships and excellent discipline and behaviour management. The range of activities is good, and lessons often benefit from the school's specialist performing arts status which means many staff are trained in using drama techniques.
- Outstanding use is made of a range of external speakers, theatre companies and dance groups to support PSHE learning on curriculum extension days.
- Some of the learning in PSHE education is assessed through subjects and some external accreditation, such as the St John's first aid certificate, is available. However, no formal system is in place for assessing PSHE learning or reporting to parents.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the PSHE curriculum is good.

- PSHE education permeates the whole curriculum because of the school's Catholic Mission statement. It is taught through strands in other subjects,

through some tutor periods and through well-organised curriculum extension days. However, because no discrete lessons are provided, the curriculum is fragmented and there are no specific schemes of work for PSHE education. The school recognises this challenge and is planning to review provision.

- PSHE education is supported and underpinned by the achievement of the Healthy Schools award and the Essex Gold award for healthy eating. These have focused the school on improving healthy eating and increasing exercise.
- Careers education and guidance are well-organised and links with the Connexions Service are good. However, in the sixth form, insufficient attention is given to the needs of students who do not wish to go for Higher Education.
- The wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities gives students outstanding opportunities to apply and practise their personal and social skills.
- The impact of performing arts specialist status on PSHE education is outstanding. Stunning artwork and photography are displayed around the school expressing different emotions and examining contemporary issues. Students are encouraged to take responsibility and leadership roles in the arts and to be outwardly focused. Performing arts lessons cover a range of PSHE issues in dance, music and drama and there is a wealth of international projects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

The leadership and management of PSHE education are good.

- Joint responsibility for PSHE education is taken by the senior leadership team and they have an accurate picture of the quality of provision. However, the school does not have a coordinator for PSHE education to provide an overview, pull the various strands of the subject together or specifically monitor the teaching of PSHE education. The school has recognised this and is moving in the right direction.
- No one has the PSHE certificate and some staff lack specialist training in teaching the more sensitive areas of the curriculum.
- The leadership and management of PSHE provision in the sixth form are good. An interesting programme has been established which is managed well and meets most of the students' needs.
- Careers education and guidance is well led and an appropriate development plan is in place which has identified gaps in provision and is based on an extensive information, advice and guidance audit.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- appointing a coordinator for PSHE education to draw together the various strands of the curriculum
- assessing more formally, students' progress as they move through the various elements of PSHE education and reporting this to parents.

I hope that 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