

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



28 February 2007

Dr P Hazlewood
Headteacher
St John's School and Community College
Stedman Building
Orchard Road
Marlborough
SN8 4AX

Dear Dr Hazlewood

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 and 27 February 2007 to look at your school's curriculum and how innovation contributes to standards and achievement.

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. All feedback letters are published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and visits to some lessons, seeing the school at work.

The overall effectiveness of the curriculum is judged to be outstanding. The school prepares its pupils extremely well in Year 7 for the rest of their secondary education.

Achievement and standards

- Pupils achieve well. There is evidence of impact of the curriculum in Year 7 on achievement at the end of the year, at the end of Key Stage 3 and on GCSE results, though progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 is not quite as good as elsewhere in the school.
- Students have very well developed competencies and learning skills. They are very cooperative yet independent learners, organise themselves well, and make decisions about their learning. They demonstrate remarkable listening skills, both to each other and to staff, and show considerable patience in supporting their peers. Their speaking skills are very good in Year 8 but Year 7 pupils demonstrated some weaknesses in extended speaking.

- Students' personal development is outstanding. They are confident and enthusiastic learners who enjoy school. Attendance figures for Year 7 are high. Boys and girls, able and less able, work very well together. There are examples of individual pupils making significant progress in their social and interpersonal skills during their time at the school. They enjoy making decisions about pathways through their work, their preferred learning style and the extended tasks rather than short term targets, particularly related to work to be done outside school. The high level of personal and class decision making has not been extended into contributing to decisions about the whole school through an effective school council. The planned move to a student researcher model is an appropriate attempt to solve this problem.

Quality of teaching and the curriculum

- There is an innovative approach to curriculum delivery in Year 7. It is thoughtfully planned through themes, each of which encompasses all subjects of the National Curriculum and some others. There are many opportunities for pupils to carry out research and there is an overriding focus on developing key skills and learning competencies. The mapping of subjects against the National Curriculum together with some assessed tasks means that pupils also understand how their work relates to a National Curriculum level.
- Teaching has many good aspects. The lessons observed contained much active learning; they developed pupils' key skills and were well organised. In general there is some inconsistency in the way teachers make connections between areas of study and this has been recognised and addressed in planning for 2007/08. The class 'log book' does not always record lessons in sufficient detail for it to be a useful tool for the next teacher.
- Pupils take every opportunity to use ICT to support their learning, but the poor state of the buildings, particularly in the lower school site, impacts negatively on this.

Leadership and management of the curriculum

- The curriculum project has been led expertly and enthusiastically by yourself and senior staff over the last six years. From the outset it followed the structure of an action – based research model, including involvement of higher education and outside agencies. As such, at every stage outcomes and measures of impact have been planned for and assessed, and the models of delivery adapted, tried and tested. This results in a depth of understanding of what will and what won't be successful and a continually evolving methodology. The school has done very well to amass such a wealth of information about impact. The outcomes are used to inform debate about the curriculum in other years.
- Management has used data well to rationalise the curriculum throughout the school, for example to bring forward some GCE entries. Staff are well placed in the move to personalised learning. The information gained from

this project is also being used very well to inform the debate nationally about the curriculum in Key Stage 3.

- The timetable is made complex by the split site and the high number of part time teachers. In its current format it is not able to fully support the aims of the Year 7 innovation.
- You work closely with your primary schools where possible and are developing a well-formed view of how the school can help support an effective 5 – 19 curriculum in the area.
- There are numerous examples of effective whole school practice emerging from this innovation. Examples include:
 - tutor groups lunching with their teacher one day per week to discuss issues
 - using pupils as leaders where they have expertise
 - designating key staff as “Directors of Impact and Innovation”, a move that reinforces the nature of their role across the school.

Inclusion

- This is a very inclusive school. All groups of pupils enjoy and achieve well. The Year 7 curriculum inspires pupils with gifts and talents and suits the needs of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- to consider how the timetable can better support the philosophy of the Year 7 curriculum, particularly by an early agreement on teams, Planning, Preparation and Assessment time, the impact of the number of part time teachers and the introduction of the international baccalaureate
- to look further at how the proposed teams for 2007 – 08 can be secure in making links between areas by reviewing the use of the class log and seeking out models to audit and develop teachers’ subject knowledge.

Neither of these areas indicates any weakness; rather they are suggestions of how strengths may be further built upon.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the curriculum 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 Ofsted’s website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Williams
Her Majesty’s Inspector