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Ms Sarah Dignasse
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Dear Ms Dignasse

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme 2006/7 – PSHE

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 27–28 March 2007 to look at work in PSHE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject including assessment and support and guidance of individual students, the visit had a particular focus on assessing the impact of the school working in partnership with a range of specialists, both from within and outside school, in order to provide an effective and coherent programme.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our evaluation and reporting. Any published report is likely to list the names of the institutions visited, but we would not identify individual institutions within the report itself.

The evidence used to inform the judgements I made included: meetings with yourself, the assistant head and line manager for PSHE, the head of PSHE, the PSHE Key Stage 3 coordinator, school based and externally based partners and several groups of students, scrutiny of school documentation including the SEF, self-evaluation improvement plan, governors' review and schemes of work, analysis of students' work, student presentations, observation of six lessons and a Year 9 Assembly and a visit to the allotment.

I undertook to provide a brief written version of the main points made in my feedback at the end of the visit, to support development in PSHE.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

- Good learning takes place and students achieve well because the PSHE programme effectively increases their knowledge and understanding and helps them to develop their personal and social skills. The vast majority of students develop good attitudes to work and behave well because they are interested in what they are doing.
- Students settle quickly in Year 7 and again when transferring to the Farnbridge Road site in Year 9 because transition arrangements are good and they are well supported by staff.
- No significant differences were seen in lessons between the progress of male and female students although there are some differences in exam results. For example, in the 2006 PSHE/Citizenship course there was a greater percentage of girls in Key Stage 3 working at the higher levels. Also, in the GCSE examination in Citizenship the achievement of girls was considerably higher than boys when achieving grades A* to C. In the three years of results, however, students have generally achieved above expectation relative to their prior attainment. The pilot AS Citizenship course produced excellent results last year.
- Most students get involved in discussions, reflect on what others say and argue their points sensibly. They explore their attitudes, feelings and values and show respect for those different from their own. Many make good relationships with staff and each other. Most are aware of their own qualities and the qualities of others and are able to use these to complete a task successfully.
- Students are well prepared for further study, work and adult life and develop skills of communication and organisation when, for example, arranging activities in the community such as the Friday evening football tournaments.
- Students are aware of their rights and responsibilities and play an important part in the school and wider community through the School Council and work with the District Council. They say it feels 'cool' to be on the School Council. They develop confidence as they move through the school and their self-esteem is raised through taking part in activities, such as their performance in the Royal Albert Hall last year.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are good.

- PSHE is taught well by a team of tutors, specialist staff and a wide range of specialist providers based outside school. Teachers and specialist have good levels of subject knowledge and very good use is made of their expertise to ensure a wide range of activities is provided and up-to-date advice given.
- Throughout the school, sufficient time is allocated to ensure good learning; appropriate resources are available.

- The expertise of teaching assistants is used well to support students' progress and manage the behaviour and attitudes of a few students who find learning difficult.
- Planning is generally good with clear objectives that are explained to students so that they know what they are going to do and learn. Most teachers use a good range of teaching activities which maintain the students' interests and reflect the range of learning needs in each class. Students state that learning is more interesting when they are able to use discussion and drama to develop their ideas.
- Teachers' questioning is frequently good and skilfully develops pupils' thinking in many lessons. Because there are high expectations throughout the school, pupils usually respond well.
- Members of staff and external providers are enthusiastic about PSHE and use this enthusiasm well to motivate students' learning. They act as good role models through their own behaviour and the respect they show to students and each other.
- PSHE is taught within a safe, secure and supportive environment where students feel able to put forward their views and raise their concerns. Most enjoy their learning because they see it as being relevant to their needs. Those in Years 12 and 13 say they look forward to their sessions because they are able to use what they learn 'in real life'. Younger students feel they are well integrated into school and get support on issues such as homework.
- Students have a good understanding of how to live healthy lives and this is affecting what they do. Examples include better choices for lunch, healthier snacks and good take up of activities which help to raise fitness levels. Formal PSHE sessions ensure that students have a good understanding of the dangers associated with smoking, drinking alcohol and substance abuse and a successful smoking cessation clinic is now established. Several specific areas of the school's provision such as the Year 8 Healthy Exercise Unit and Year 5 Safe in the Sun awareness campaign, contribute well.
- Overall, the school satisfactorily assesses pupils' learning in PSHE. A range of assessment techniques are used across the school so that staff generally have an understanding of what students have achieved. However, this area of the school's work is currently under review. Assessment is not sufficiently accurate and does not fully identify potential underachievement or the need for further challenge. There is also a need to bring more coherence and consistency to assessment and the systematic recording of students' progress and achievements so that information is more manageable and accessible.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of programmes and activities which matches the needs of students and develops their social, emotional and intellectual maturity. It has a clear structure, meets statutory requirements and gives equal access and opportunity for all pupils to learn and make good progress. Good links are made with other subject areas such as art, science and literature, each of which clearly identifies how to contribute to the PSHE programme.

- The impact of the school's performing arts specialist status can be seen through the curriculum and teaching, for example in the activities planned and different methods of teaching.
- Citizenship is effectively built into the PSHE programme and staff encourage students to put theory into practice. There is a strong work-related dimension to the school's work as well as exceptionally good links with the community. Some of the students' work in the community is excellent and has been acknowledged through the High Sheriffs Award.
- Students receive good care, guidance and support which helps them to achieve well and take part in an impressive range of activities outside school. A good range of support agencies, including student mentors and counsellors, help students to understand the symptoms of personal stress and how to deal with it. Similarly, specialist input ensures that students have a good understanding of issues such as relationships and sexual health risks.
- There is a good, whole school integrated approach to guidance using skills from within the school and outside. All students receive formal guidance on aspects such as careers education and vocational and non-vocational options. This helps their personal development and results in students having a good level of knowledge to help them make choices.
- Good opportunities are provided for students of all abilities to develop workplace skills in school, college and work placements. They report that they have gained much from these. Students in the sixth form feel they are very well prepared for life at university, further study or work, particularly since the improvement to the Year 13 PSHE programme which they had a hand in developing.
- Most students say they know how to improve their work but weaknesses in some teachers' marking and the lack of clear targets for learning means that this is not always the case.

Subject leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- You and the senior management team have a clear understanding of the need for a comprehensive PSHE programme throughout the school and the subject has a high profile. You are all committed to its development and there is a common sense of purpose amongst staff.
- Members of the Personal Development Faculty thrive on new ideas and try out fresh initiatives with confidence. Staff are knowledgeable and have particularly good links with external agencies. The faculty leader manages provision well and his expertise is acknowledged through his contributions to local fora and training sessions. The school has a good number of well trained staff and providers who meet the demands of the PSHE programme well.

- Through effective monitoring and evaluation, the faculty has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. The school's evaluation of its work in PSHE is accurate. The helpful improvement plan highlights appropriate areas which focus on raising achievement and standards, developing teaching and learning and enhancing provision of students and staff are regularly sought and acted upon.

Subject issue: partnerships

The school has excellent partnerships with a range of specialists, both from within and outside school, which help to provide a good PSHE programme. A key feature of this aspect of the school's work is the co-ordination and management of the Personal Development Faculty leader who has very good knowledge of a range of people and brings their skills and expertise together to provide a coherent and stimulating programme. Skills are developed within school, for example, with tutors in Year 7 and this ensures that relationships are well established. Similarly, tutors have a key role to play in the sixth form. The use of specialist staff and providers has impacted positively on the quality of the programme and its teaching.

Inclusion

Inclusion is central to the work of the school and has high priority. The progress of different groups of students is tracked and interventions made, when appropriate. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported in the PSHE programme by specialist staff. Specialist staff give effective support for students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language so all are well integrated. Students have a very good understanding of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and work hard to eliminate bullying and racism. They are helped to understand the need for racial tolerance, respect and harmony through several aspects of the PSHE programme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the bringing together of existing areas of effective assessment to create a co-ordinated and more structured view of students' progress and achievements
- create an easily accessible system of recording students' achievements both within school and the community.

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

As I explained, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Authority and will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Frith
Additional Inspector