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Mr Ainsley
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Dear Mr Ainsley

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14-15 February to look at work in PSHE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of PSHE, the visit had a particular focus on provision for economic well-being.

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 will be 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of six lessons and other relevant activities.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards in PSHE

Achievement and standards in PSHE are good.

- Students demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding in key areas of PSHE.
- Students learn how to stay safe and healthy. Posters and other displays around the school reinforce messages about how best to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The school further encourages students to be healthy by providing healthy options in the canteen and through the morning exercise programme.

- Students understand the risks associated with smoking, drugs and alcohol and have good knowledge about sexual health. They are fully aware of how to access further advice, support and guidance.
- Students are able to articulate their understandings about personal, social and health issues very well indeed. In lessons they contribute thoughtfully and constructively to debates, demonstrating great maturity.
- Students' social responsibility is developed through the very active 'student voice'. Their opinions on issues affecting the school are listened to and acted upon. Students' social skills are further developed through the well organised 'peer listener' and 'senior student' schemes.

Quality of teaching and learning in PSHE

The quality of teaching and learning in PSHE is good.

- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and confidence in teaching PSHE. Outside speakers, and the well-respected school nurse are regularly called upon to bring wider expertise to the programme.
- Teachers use a range of effective, participatory approaches including role-play, simulation, games and information and communications technology (ICT). Creativity is encouraged through drama and art work. Students respond very well to these activities.
- ICT is used effectively throughout the programme, enabling students to research topics and advice services, produce presentations, conduct surveys and complete their Records of Achievement.
- Students' work is self-assessed at the end of each module. They take this very seriously and set themselves targets which are discussed at annual review meetings with their form tutor. Extra support is given where needed, although there is no formal teacher assessment of knowledge and understanding in PSHE. Students' PSHE files are used by form tutors to report progress to parents.

Quality of the PSHE curriculum

The PSHE curriculum is outstanding.

- The school provides an excellent age-appropriate curriculum. All statutory requirements are met and the revisiting of topics facilitates good progress between key stages.
- The curriculum enables a very good balance, and effective coordination of PSHE knowledge and understanding and the development of personal and social skills.
- The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance is exemplary. Students have a plethora of avenues to take to gain further support, such as, the school library, telephone numbers and addresses displayed around school and in student planners, trained peer listeners, Connexions advisors, form tutors and the school nurse. Students are very confident about using these services.

Leadership and management of PSHE

The leadership and management of PSHE are good.

- Subject action planning is good. The subject coordinator is well aware of the strengths and areas for further development. Policies relating to PSHE and the teaching programmes are regularly reviewed by the subject coordinator and governors; informed by students, tutors, parents and carers.
- Well planned schemes of work, lesson plans and materials ensure the development of students' knowledge, understanding and skills. Classroom resources are well deployed. Suitable texts are used with supplementary materials, adapted by staff to meet the needs of their classes.
- The quality of teaching and learning in PSHE is monitored by the heads of year and the subject coordinator. However this is not a formal part of performance management systems in the school and PSHE lessons are not observed by the senior management team. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not systematically linked to further professional development.
- Transition arrangements are good with respect to students' pastoral needs but there is insufficient liaison with feeder primary schools regarding the PSHE curriculum.

Subject issue: Economic well being

- The PSHE and wider curriculum programme includes a range of activities linked to developing good economic well being.
- The PSHE programme includes lessons on personal financial management at both key stages. Key Stage 4 activities include the 'world of work', 'enterprise week' and mock interviews held off-site by local employers. All Year 10 students have two weeks of work experience in the summer term and there is an increase in the number of extended work placements in Year 11. Senior students in Year 10 have their work accredited by the Institute of Management.

Equality and diversity

- All curricular and extra-curricular PSHE experiences are open to all students. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities access excellent PSHE through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)
- Teaching Assistants provide support to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in PSHE lessons.
- Gifted and talented students with no family history of higher education are offered university taster courses through the Aim Higher programme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving subject liaison work with feeder primary schools
- linking the monitoring of teaching and learning to further professional development.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector