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Dear Ms Giles

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 November 2008 to look at work in promoting equality.

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 made included discussions with key members of staff, students, carers, key partners and the observation of parts of four lessons.

The quality of provision to promote equalities is good.

Features of good practice observed

- Achievement of students who join the school after experiencing disruption to their education is good because of the way the staff monitor their progress and ensure they settle quickly into the school community.
- The staff is a stable one and, under the strong leadership of teachers, the teaching assistants support new arrivals well. These students know that they are well cared for.
- Links with the carers of students who are looked after are strong, and staff ensure that these students are well supported from the moment they arrive.
- The personal development of older boys who might otherwise disengage from schooling is good because they take part in the extensive range of sports activities and events. They are proud to represent the school in competitive fixtures.

- The well-being and social development of boys in Year 10 is enhanced by their attendance on the five day residential experience at the start of the year. This is a well-established feature of provision and improves social cohesion and integration. The school's sporting specialism has a very significant positive impact on the engagement and achievement of many vulnerable students.
- Students who find a traditional curriculum challenging are well supported by the school's partnerships with other providers. As a result there are opportunities to learn and develop their skills in vocational areas, such as engineering, that are well matched to their needs.
- Students who might otherwise be concerned at starting secondary school are well supported by their attendance at the 'transition' club that takes place over a period of several weeks during the term before they enter Year 7. A feature is the involvement of existing Year 10 students.
- Staff work very hard to develop the confidence of students who are struggling in their lives. For example, the age appropriate reward systems of merits and certificates recognise efforts in extra curricular activities as well as academic work. Multi-agency support packages are helpful where pupils face significant challenges.
- In mathematics, for example, teachers plan their lessons so that students with learning difficulties and those new to school are not left behind. This motivates them and, as a result, they behave well and respond positively.
- Relationships between staff and students are good, with many citing the relatively small size of the school as being to their benefit.
- An alternative curriculum is provided two days a week which increases the motivation and participation of a small group of Year 9 boys who otherwise might be at risk of disengagement. For example, the basic rules of first aid promote key life skills and develop their awareness of safety issues. A feature is the input from the Year 11 girls who are taking the Junior Sports Leader Award, and who are good role models.
- School leaders use resources well to support the needs of different groups of students. For example, learning mentors are effective in working with students who find engaging with lessons challenging, while teaching assistants support well those who are new to English and/or new to school. The result is that these students quickly catch up and make good progress in their learning.
- The school's extensive provision in sports includes provision for everyone, including those students who do not have an interest in the traditional sports. For example, there are opportunities to participate in Ozboxing (non contact boxing), trampolining and street dance. Students are even able to access a local gym so that they are able to stay fit and healthy.
- There are good opportunities for the less academically motivated students to develop their leadership skills alongside their peers. This contributes to their enjoyment of school, and involves them in well in the local community.

Areas for development

- Formally evaluate the performance and outcomes of the different groups of students in the school.

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

As I explained previously, 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

Henry Moreton
Additional Inspector