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Dear Mrs Young

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 January 2009 to look at work in planning for and implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum with particular reference to Year 7.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the planning for and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 were above average. At this early stage of the implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, it is not possible to make a firm judgement on its impact on achievement but the progress of the students observed in lessons was excellent.

- The range and quality of the work seen in the students' books confirmed the judgements on standards and progress.
- Students have the ability to order and present their work logically and succinctly, making appropriate use of charts, graphs and diagrams to illustrate key points in their writing.

- Students say they are making excellent progress because the work they are given is interesting and challenging and they like their teachers.
- Students' functional skills are highly developed and used flexibly and well across the curriculum.
- Year 7 students' personal development is outstanding. They are confident and articulate, they are keen to learn and they show respect for each other and the adults they work with.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is excellent.
- Attendance rates are high and nearly all students go on to the sixth form and then higher education.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in Year 7 is outstanding.

- Progress is rapid because students listen and can concentrate for long periods, they have the ability to work collaboratively and independently and they do their homework diligently.
- Excellent use is made of information and communication technology as a teaching and learning aid. Students spoke enthusiastically about the work they do on the interactive whiteboard and the use they make of the school's learning website.
- Students speak about the teaching and learning styles that suit them best. They enjoy open-ended questions which make them think. They respond well to questions posed in different ways about a problem so they can explore various approaches to solving it. Many like to find things out for themselves and then talk to others about what they have learnt.
- There are a few students who are nervous about such challenging teaching and learning and hesitate to make mistakes. They want direction from their teachers on how to learn.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They plan interesting and varied learning activities and they monitor students' progress rigorously and accurately. They ensure they get the support and guidance they need on how to improve.
- Vulnerable students or those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive the support they need and make excellent progress academically and in their personal development.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the new curriculum in Year 7 is outstanding.

- The school has made excellent progress in adapting schemes of work to incorporate the revised National Curriculum.
- Curriculum plans make clear the links between subjects and students are given opportunities to develop their personal, learning, thinking and functional skills in a range of contexts.

- The excellent personal, social and health education programme contributes significantly to students' personal development, including their economic and financial capability.
- The excellent provision for teaching modern foreign languages and the international links play a key part in students' ability to use language well and in their cultural awareness.
- Christian worship, opportunities for reflection, attention to the emotional aspects of learning, reverence for the unknown, all provide for students' excellent spiritual development.
- There are extensive and well-attended extra-curricular activities which enrich and extend the learning done in class and do much for students' well-being and self-confidence.
- A start has been made in implementing a more flexible curriculum structure to extend collaborative working between subjects and to make better use of time and resources.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

The leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is outstanding.

- The experience gained from the excellent leadership and management of the school's specialist status in technology and languages has provided the basis for the smooth and efficient introduction of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. Change has been handled well by the senior leaders.
- Again, past experience, this time from the training school status, has resulted in appropriate and timely training for staff. They were well prepared for the changes and as a result the teaching of personal, learning, thinking and functional skills is evident in lessons, in students' books and from conversations with them.
- Subject leaders have been fully involved in planning for and implementing the changes. They have undertaken a thorough review of existing provision and modified their schemes of work to give greater emphasis to learning skills. Students now have more opportunities for independent learning as a result of the reduced content in the Year 7 curriculum. Also, students have a more coherent learning experience because the links between subjects are made clear.
- The school's high attaining status, together with the effective way change has been handled, means that it has an excellent capacity to build on and refine the new curriculum.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is outstanding.

- The school has a history of ensuring that every student reaches her potential academically and in her personal development.
- Students' qualifications, skills and personal qualities prepare them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and for future employment.

There are no significant areas for improvement, apart from the implementation of the new curriculum structure.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower
Additional Inspector