

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Shaw
Headteacher
Prudhoe Community High School
Moor Road
Prudhoe
Northumberland
NE42 5LJ

Dear Mr Shaw

Ofsted survey inspection programme – physical education (PE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 and 26 February 2009 to look at work in PE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on assessing the PE contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) particularly 'being healthy'.

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 impact of the specialist technology college status, interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of nine lessons or parts of lessons and a range of extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of physical education was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding.

- Results in GCSE PE are consistently above average and in 2008 the number of students gaining A* and A grades was particularly high. At well over a third, the proportion of students taking PE at GCSE is higher than in most schools.
- Results for students taking A-level PE are above average, though at AS level, results are closer to average.
- Year 9 students achieve well above average levels of performance from an overall average start.

- Achievement in leadership is outstanding. A very high proportion of students in Years 10 to 13 gain a leadership qualification in sport and/or dance. Many gain further national governing body accreditation for officiating and coaching across a wide range of sports and activities.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of how to stay healthy and develop fitness and their ability to evaluate their own and each other's performance are strengths.
- Girls and boys achieve equally well. Students identified as gifted and talented achieve exceptionally well because they are encouraged to use their talents to the full and are well supported. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve exceptionally well. Specific programmes to support students with motor difficulties help to promote progress and success.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. Behaviour is exemplary and students demonstrate excellent attitudes showing high levels of commitment to learning and improvement.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Positive, trusting relationships help students to feel secure and confident when contributing to lessons. For example, they enjoy vigorous debates on topical sporting issues such as government funding for sports following the success in the Olympic Games.
- Teachers set very high expectations of students' learning and conduct. Lesson activities provide a high level of challenge and move on at a rapid pace. Students say that lessons are fun and very well matched to their needs and interests. Students rise to the challenges and make rapid progress. They appreciate the way that teachers go out of their way to make sure that they understand their work and are making progress.
- Teachers' very secure knowledge and understanding of the subject ensures that learning is well planned in suitable steps, that questioning is probing and develops greater depth of thinking.
- Lessons are purposeful and students know exactly what is expected of them. Clear targets and guidance ensure that students know how well they are doing and exactly what they must do to improve. Students are frequently involved in self and peer assessment which they recognise as benefiting them a great deal.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to support learning in theory lessons and increasingly in practical lessons. However, this is hampered by limited access to computers and the internet in some of the teaching rooms.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with some outstanding features.

- All students in Year 9 have access to two hours or more high quality PE per week but in Years 10 and 11 only around half of students have this level of access. Many sixth form students take part in sport and PE related courses and extra-curricular activities but there is no regular timetabled session for all students currently.
- The curriculum and the range of extra-curricular activities are adapted and adjusted to meet students' needs and interests, helping to improve students' level of participation and their achievement. For example, an OCR National in Sport level 3 course was introduced this year to Year 12 to provide for students for whom the A-level course is not suitable.
- A very good range of accreditation is offered to students from Year 10 through to Year 13 in sport, PE and performing arts. Opportunities to develop leadership skills and gain accreditation are outstanding.
- A group of students is disappointed that GCSE dance is not yet offered.
- An excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities is offered and it enables all students, not only those who excel in PE and sport, to take part and enjoy activities.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- A very strong team of staff are highly committed to and are successful in raising standards, improving pupils' personal development and improving provision for all students.
- This is a highly inclusive department. All students are given opportunities to succeed, even those 'hard to reach' students. PE staff liaise very effectively with pastoral leaders to support individual students with barriers to learning and/or are at risk of losing interest in school and their futures. Much is done by PE staff to help re-engage students in school and learning, through building on positive relationships and developing their interest in the subject further.
- Self-evaluation at subject level is secure. Regular monitoring of outcomes, provision and extensive consultation with students informs an accurate view of strengths and the action needed to make improvements.
- Well focused professional development and regular sharing of best practice in teaching and learning lead to improvements in provision.
- Although the accommodation for PE is extensive and well used, the curriculum is interrupted when part of the PE accommodation is used for school examinations on a number of occasions throughout the year.
- Lack of access to computers and the internet hampers/restricts the extent and range of learning activities in some lessons, as does the limited number of specialist classrooms.

Subject issue - PE contribution to the outcomes of ECM particularly 'being healthy'

The PE contribution to the outcomes of ECM particularly 'being healthy' is outstanding.

- Students develop a very thorough understanding of how to stay healthy and fit for life and sport. PE programmes for core lessons are designed to develop a thorough knowledge and understanding of health related issues. The high proportion of students following leadership and other accredited courses ensures that by age 16 the majority of pupils have a very good depth of understanding.
- The PE department contributes significantly to students' understanding of health issues through a wider involvement in the whole school programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education. PE staff lead effective assemblies on health and diet, and contribute to 'Life Style' days when the focus is on improving students' awareness of health and fitness and their involvement in health related activities.
- The strong focus on leadership within the curriculum ensures that students are highly aware of how to keep themselves and others safe during activity.
- The vast majority of students gain a great deal from PE lessons, not only through a commitment to good performance but also through the opportunities to develop leadership skills. The high level of participation in lessons and extra-curricular activities in all year groups reflects students' commitment to and enjoyment of the subject.
- Through their activities in PE and sport, students are making an outstanding contribution to the community. The high number of students actively involved in leadership within the school, in local partner schools and in community-based clubs and activities is exceptional.
- Students are exceptionally well prepared for the future. The many opportunities they have to take responsibility for activities, their own learning in lessons, and to work collaboratively in pairs and groups, prepare them well for the future. Students demonstrate a high level of commitment to activities and learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the involvement of more students in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form in at least two hours high quality PE or sport each week
- improving access to information and communication technology in PE lessons for students and staff in both theory and practical lessons
- improving access to dedicated classrooms for PE theory.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop physical education 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

Gillian Salter-Smith
Additional Inspector