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2 November 2011

Ms M Currie
Principal
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Dear Ms Currie

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE education)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 18 and 19 October 2011 to look at work in PSHE education.

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 included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PSHE education is good.

Achievement in PSHE education

Achievement in PSHE education is good.

- Students have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They appreciate the importance of a balanced diet and understand the role exercise plays in maintaining physical and mental health. All are taught first aid and recognise the dangers of smoking and alcohol. They are well aware of the effects of the misuse of drugs and how to make informed, assertive choices for their own health and safety. They learn to risk assess personal safety scenarios including for e-safety. However, not all are fully aware of how to put their understanding of e-safety into practice.
- Students' understanding of the physical and emotional aspects of sex and relationships education (SRE) is good and they know where and who to go

to for further information or advice should they need it. Mental health issues, such as depression and eating disorders, are discussed and all learn about resisting peer-pressure. They know about the different sorts of bullying including cyber, racist, sexist and homophobic bullying.

- Students have an excellent understanding of business and enterprise. Financial management is taught in tutorial time and is reinforced in mathematics and in enterprise activities. Study of the qualities, attitudes and skills to aid employability begins in Year 7; the sixth form understands well their next step choices and how to achieve them. Students have a positive outlook and take advantage of the opportunities to help develop their personal and social skills.

Quality of teaching in PSHE education

The quality of teaching in PSHE education is good.

- Most lessons are well-planned, managed and resourced with clear and appropriate learning objectives. In the best lessons questioning is used very effectively to ascertain students' understandings and deepen their thinking, and group work is planned well to ensure all engage and participate.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and confidence are strongest where PSHE education is taught through other subjects such as food technology, science or business studies. They are less strong in tutorial time. These lessons sometimes lack the pace and challenge required to meet the needs of all students in the mixed-age classes.
- Resources are appropriate and students have good access to computer technology. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or those at the early stages of learning English benefit from the support of teaching assistants.
- A good range of methods is used to assess students' learning and progress. Students complete pre- and post-unit evaluations which are used to inform their progress review. Their economic understanding and health awareness are assessed well and students' reflective logbooks record progress in their community activities.

Quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The quality of the curriculum in PSHE education is outstanding.

- The subject is delivered through a vibrant, innovative and creative curriculum model that is continuously reviewed and revised. The mix of tutorials, short courses, Advanced Learning Days and well-planned PSHE education within other subjects results in a very coherent and comprehensive programme.
- The school's business and enterprise specialism and strong pastoral support ensure a strong careers and guidance programme. External agencies are used well to enhance provision and extra-curricular activities,

such as the performing arts, enterprise and sports, play a very important role.

- Student and teacher evaluations are used extensively to review and improve provision. The health and social context of the local community are well analysed to ensure that the school meets students' needs.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PSHE education is outstanding.

- The subject has high status and is central to the vision and ethos of the school. The management of the subject by two assistant principals is supported well by a range of pastoral and subject leaders.
- Monitoring of provision is outstanding with regard to the range of courses offered but is less robust in the evaluation of teaching and learning. Improvement planning is strong with a good range of achievable actions with timescales, resources and success criteria.
- Tutors have good access to in-house training including how to teach first aid, and on delivering aspects of economic well-being and careers. However, there is too little training for tutors on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the tutorial programme is sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of all students in mixed-age groups
- improving subject-specific staff training for tutors, particularly in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector