

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



18 October 2010

Mr A Hyatt
Headteacher
St John Wall Catholic School - A
Specialist Humanities College
Oxhill Road
Birmingham
B21 8HH

Dear Mr Hyatt

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 5 and 6 October 2010 to look at work in citizenship.

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; observation of six lessons, a peer-mentoring session and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement and enjoyment of learning in citizenship are good with some outstanding features.

- Students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship concepts are secure at both key stages. At Key Stage 4, students have a particularly good understanding of democratic politics, are able to evaluate the role that citizens play in shaping decisions and influencing systems and draw sensible conclusions.
- Achievement at Key Stage 4 is consistently good and outstanding for some students. By Year 11, students understand the value and significance of campaigning to make a difference, enhanced by their own campaigns as part of their assessed work. Results in the short course at GCSE are consistently above national averages.

- Attitudes to learning are very positive. Students value the subject, find its content relevant and enjoy the extensive opportunities to discuss current affairs and topical events, indicating that these inform their own views and opinions on key issues. Several students commented that they enjoy exploring issues that are relevant to their own and their families' lives. They particularly enjoy partner and group-work opportunities and demonstrate excellent cooperation skills in these.
- A key strength is the work underway to promote active citizenship across the school and beyond. A range of exciting opportunities challenges and interests students, adding much to their personal development. For example, the work of the school's peer-mentors, pupil support team, prefects and school council teams is impressive. Beyond school, there is considerable impact of projects such as Young Leaders, who are working to make a difference through leadership and participation and the INDIE project where students are working with young people across Europe to promote and celebrate diversity in the wider community. However, the monitoring of take-up of activities and participation rates for all groups of students is informal at present.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good.

- Consistently good teaching is securing good learning and progress in the subject. The strengths evident include: detailed planning and structuring of lessons; the successful use of a variety of approaches, including imaginative use of information and communication technology; interesting resources and lesson materials and very good relationships with students. Teachers are skilled at handling discussions and this prompts lively and interesting debates.
- The best teaching observed helps students to appreciate the relevance of citizenship issues to their own lives. This successfully explores how students' increasing understanding is influencing their views, helps them to clarify their thinking and recognise how individuals and groups can take action to make a difference.
- Where teaching is occasionally less effective, there is insufficient guidance on the steps that are needed to secure students' understanding or the selected lesson activities are not matched well to the required learning.
- Assessment procedures are secure and include an appropriate range of teacher, self- and peer-assessment. Students are aware of their current target levels and are provided with good advice on how to improve their work. Regular marking and feedback in books are key factors in this.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

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

- The time available for discrete provision at Key Stage 3 is constrained. Nevertheless, effective use is made of the time available to cover all of the requirements and provide good learning experiences. The discrete provision at Key Stage 4 is rich and varied, providing a broad range of experiences that contributes well to students' development. Key concepts are clearly identified in curriculum planning; however, the use and application of key processes is noted less routinely.
- Considerable reinforcement of the discrete provision is gained through the school's specialist humanities status. Students speak positively of their learning in religious studies, history and geography and how teachers extend their knowledge and understanding of citizenship through these subjects. However, the potential for reinforcement from other curriculum areas is underdeveloped at present.
- Some of the themes explored in cross-curricular days add another dimension to aspects of citizenship learning. Further, good links exist with other agencies and the wider community. This encourages students to engage with issues beyond the school and involve themselves in local, national and international issues. For example, the BBC News Project enables students to investigate and report on an issue of their choice for the BBC. The school's link with a school in China enriches students' understanding of life in another part of the world.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good with some outstanding features.

- The whole-school ethos is built on the foundations of faith, respect and responsibility. This supports citizenship learning well and encourages an appreciation of the value of active citizenship. As a result, the subject makes a strong contribution to the cohesion evident in this diverse and well-integrated school community.
- The subject leader provides strong and purposeful leadership. He is committed, energetic and has clear expectations of the performance in citizenship. Good programmes of study have been implemented that meet the requirements well. There is a clear commitment to develop further opportunities for active participation; a creative, forward-thinking approach is evident.
- The monitoring and evaluation of citizenship are underdeveloped at present. There are plans in place to strengthen this and extend the role of the subject leader to ensure that teaching and outcomes in the subject are evaluated more closely.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening monitoring and evaluation procedures in the subject
- auditing the key processes of citizenship across all curriculum activities
- monitoring students' participation in active citizenship more closely.

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

As I 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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector