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Mr T Lamberton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lamberton

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 17 and 18 May 2011 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; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good with outstanding features.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is outstanding.

- Students demonstrate sophisticated levels of understanding in all key areas of the curriculum. They have good attitudes to the subject which they view as essential in helping them develop the skills and understanding they will need for their future as citizens.
- Students' political understanding is enhanced by debates on topical issues. They have a thorough understanding of democracy in Britain, including the importance of free speech and a free press and are able to articulate their views on political systems in non-democratic states such as Libya and China. They understand the role of the media in influencing political opinion and holding elected representatives to account, citing the example of MPs' expenses. Their understanding of democracy is reinforced by

participating in school elections for the student council and the sixth form Head Girl and Head Boy teams. Approximately 40 sixth-form students visit the Houses of Parliament every year and others enjoy overseas political and historical visits to cities such as Berlin and Beijing.

- Students have developed excellent skills in enquiry, communication and critical thinking. This is demonstrated by their ability to debate and discuss complex and controversial issues in a mature and well-informed manner. Their skills in advocacy are honed through the many opportunities they have to lead projects and influence school policy. This includes the student council, online surveys, consultation on staff appointments and the Solution Orientated Schools meetings where they are invited to discuss key school policies alongside staff, parents and governors.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good.

- The citizenship teaching team demonstrates good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of the citizenship programme and how it should be taught. They use a wide range of participative approaches, such as role play, visual aids, simulation, group work, structured debate and discussion. Teachers plan well for the needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and extra support is available as appropriate. This ensures that all achieve equally well in citizenship.
- Teachers are skilled in dealing with sensitive and controversial issues. A respectful classroom ethos enables teachers and students to explore contentious issues in an atmosphere of emotional safety. Students are clear about their right to express an opinion and are encouraged to do so.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to good effect. Teachers use interactive whiteboards in lessons to add pace, challenge and interest. By accessing well-selected materials and websites, teachers bring topical debates and current issues into the classroom. Students access ICT to research topics and present their findings.
- Teachers know how well students are progressing in humanities subjects where citizenship issues are taught, but they are less aware of how well they are progressing against the citizenship attainment levels. Teachers use questioning in lessons to ascertain levels of understanding and work in books is marked. However, students have few opportunities to undertake sustained pieces of work in citizenship. Not all have targets for improvement or know what they need to do to meet their targets. The school is looking at a range of approaches to assessment and reporting to ensure that they are more rigorous and informative.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the curriculum in citizenship is outstanding.

- Lessons are discrete and well supported by teaching in other subjects such as geography, English, history, religious education and business studies.

Statutory requirements are met and all aspects of the National Curriculum citizenship programme of study are included.

- Students spoke with enthusiasm about their charity work in Tanzania, Nepal, Kenya and South Africa and their innovative fundraising to support the visits. Among other activities, they also engage in the Youth Speakers' competition, Duke of Edinburgh and scouting awards, Fair Trade fortnight, Eco Schools work, the Earth Summit climate change conference, visits to places of worship, such as a Sikh Gurdwara and Jewish Synagogue, and one student represents the region in the Youth Parliament. The programme is further enhanced by assemblies and special events, such as citizenship days, mock trials and elections and a host of visiting speakers to develop students' awareness of cultural diversity.
- The extensive amount of student initiated and led charity fundraising and volunteering is a very strong feature. The sixth form acts as a role model by raising large sums of money through innovative and creative activities for a range of good causes.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship is good.

- The school has a clear vision for citizenship which is understood at all levels of leadership and management, including by the very supportive and well-informed governors. Sufficient resources have been allocated in terms of curriculum time, staff responsibility, staffing and materials. The amount of departmental time and subject-specific staff training is not yet commensurate with other subjects and plans are in place to address this. Citizenship teaching rooms have interactive whiteboard technology; there are high-quality displays in classrooms and around the school and good access to ICT for students.
- The subject leader discharges his role well. Improvement planning is informed by self-evaluation and review. Teaching and learning in citizenship and the development of high-quality resources have been rightly prioritised. Current improvement planning is focused on assessment and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning but they are still at an early stage of development. Planning is not yet sufficiently rigorous and success criteria are not defined clearly enough.
- The good support of the senior leadership team, combined with the hard work, dedication and skills of the subject leader, suggests the department has good capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students' progress is rigorously assessed and reported on effectively
- ensuring that action planning for improvement is robust and effective.

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

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector