

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Dr J Valentine
Acting Headteacher
Chancellor's School
Pine Grove
Brookmans Park
Hatfield
AL9 7BN

Dear Dr Valentine

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 21 and 22 June 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is satisfactory with some good features.

- Students at Key Stage 3 have a reasonable grasp of the subject's key concepts and work through the key processes with confidence. Their knowledge of rights and responsibilities is better than their understanding of the issues around identity and diversity and the role and responsibilities of government.
- At Key Stages 4 and 5, students' knowledge and understanding are more secure. Their political literacy is enhanced through the attention paid to this in their respective examination courses and they are more aware of topical issues and world affairs. They form opinions and express their views with confidence.

- A wide range of opportunities supports active citizenship, particularly for the sixth form, many of whom participate with keen interest. They are passionate about their contributions to the school and wider community through charity events and activities that support younger students. Many of them speak of the importance of 'making a difference' and the inspirational nature of their various involvements. However, several younger students expressed the wish for greater opportunities for leadership roles and for greater impact of the student council's role in supporting school improvement.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is satisfactory with some good features.

- The teaching observed was satisfactory with some of it good or better. However, this remains variable, particularly at Key Stage 3. Here, non-specialist teachers require greater support to develop their expertise and build confidence in the required assessment procedures and teaching controversial or sensitive issues.
- Teachers conduct their lessons with pace and energy. Relationships are positive; most students respond well to questioning. Teachers use a range of effective approaches, including the effective use of information and communication technology to support learning. Discussion work is a regular feature; students enjoy expressing their views and listening to others. However, whole-class discussions are not always effective with more lively groups; on occasions, these require managing and structuring more thoughtfully to ensure that all students are able to contribute and that ground rules regarding expectations are made clear.
- In an outstanding history lesson observed, the teacher consistently highlighted citizenship themes as students explored whether Asian and Black soldiers who fought for Britain in the First World War were being forgotten in history. The teacher's expectations of students' contributions were consistently high. Her questioning was sharp and pertinent; she drew out thoughtful comments from students relating to identity and diversity, discrimination and the importance of shared history in our multi-cultural society. Effective use of resources and a supportive, encouraging approach from their teacher promoted students' interest and stimulated lively participation. Consequently, they worked with enthusiasm and the pace of learning was rapid.
- The work evident in students' books is variable. Inconsistent expectations regarding the presentation and quality of work result in too much variation in students' responses. Teachers provide a good level of ongoing verbal feedback in lessons which encourages students and prompts their engagement in discussions. However, formal assessment in terms of citizenship learning is underdeveloped.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the curriculum in citizenship is satisfactory.

- Citizenship provision has improved recently and now includes examination work at Key Stages 4 and 5. Provision has strengthened at Key Stage 4 where it is well planned, coherent and regularly assessed. A wide range of good resources has been assembled to support students' learning. These include appropriate materials on current affairs and topical events which highlight media issues and raise the profile and relevance of the subject for students.
- Some useful units of relevant and interesting work are introduced at Key Stage 3 through the personal, social, health, economic and citizenship programme. However, these would benefit from review and rationalisation to ensure that the full statutory programme is covered and that suitable depth and progression are being built throughout the lower years. This would establish a firm foundation for students to achieve more highly in their examination work at Key Stage 4.
- The contribution made to citizenship across the curriculum is variable as this is not currently mapped in detail or followed up in consultation with subject leaders. There is much potential here to reinforce students' understanding; this is done particularly well in history where teachers identify and effectively reinforce citizenship concepts in their lessons, specifically referring to these and drawing on comments from students on a variety of citizenship themes.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship is satisfactory.

- The school has taken bold steps to address some of the issues in provision arising from the last full inspection report. The focus on improving provision at Key Stages 4 and 5 has had an impact on improving students' knowledge and understanding across a range of citizenship issues. However, the curriculum time available this year has been constrained with some associated negative impact on achievement. The school plans to address this issue next year.
- The subject leader and second specialist teacher have worked hard to establish the subject, improve its status and maintain the impetus of the new courses to good effect. The energy and drive evident from both is commendable; this has not been lost on students who appreciate their enthusiasm and commitment. However, due to other school commitments, both members of staff have limited capacity to drive forward the further improvements required. There are important decisions to be made in order to secure the future leadership of the subject and implement the subject improvement plan in the months ahead.
- The school recognises the need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation procedures in citizenship. This will enable senior leaders to have a clear view of the impact and effectiveness of improvement strategies on raising achievement in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- securing a subject leader with appropriate resources and responsibility to drive improvements
- providing training and support for staff in assessment procedures at Key Stage 3
- mapping Key Stage 3 provision, to include the contributions made across the wider curriculum
- strengthening monitoring and evaluation procedures in citizenship.

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