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Mr M Sutton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sutton

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 12 and 13 October 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; observation of parts of six lessons; and brief visits to three sixth form enrichment classes, an assembly, a tutor period and an extra-curricular activity.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good.

- Students' attainment in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory with areas of strength, for example their understanding of issues related to human rights. However, their understanding of politics and government is weaker. Students' progress is good overall, particularly in terms of participation and responsible action. Many take on significant responsibility; for example, as trained mentors to work with students at transition or with lower attaining students.
- Students showed good capacity to engage in discussion of issues, make decisions and present their views, when given the opportunity.

- Students at different levels of attainment make equally good progress. Good discussion and reflection was seen in a mixed-attainment group on attitudes towards Travellers and the implications of recent deliberations on Dale Farm. Lower attaining students studying human rights have completed creditable work, prioritising those rights they consider to be most important.
- Student involvement plays an important part in the school's promotion of community cohesion, judged outstanding in the previous inspection.
- Students on the school council demonstrate good achievement as representatives of the student body and understand how the school council involves democratic processes and principles.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good.

- Lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. The most effective lessons were very well planned and resourced to engage students in a series of activities that deepened their understanding of citizenship issues. Teachers showed confidence in dealing with sensitive and controversial issues.
- In most of the lessons observed activities were well matched to the students' attainment levels.
- All lessons observed were characterised by students' good behaviour and readiness to learn. Although records show incidents of misbehaviour in the past, none are logged for this term.
- Teachers showed good generic skills but in a minority of lessons weaknesses in subject knowledge limited the effectiveness of the lesson. Students commented on different teaching styles, with learning ranging from active to passive, with this having a determining effect on their enjoyment of and engagement in lessons.
- Assessment consists of a termly grade and sometimes is focused on a specific piece of work, such as the outcomes of research. It also includes a self-assessment element which is detailed but not qualitative. Assessment is currently not geared either to the National Curriculum or to GCSE criteria.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the curriculum in citizenship is satisfactory.

- The core citizenship curriculum, situated within the personal development programme, includes substantial content on aspects of citizenship such as human rights. However, key aspects, including politics and government and UK diversity, receive light treatment. Some units are issues-led, for example 'homelessness', and are less explicit than they might be in developing citizenship understanding and skills.

- Some of the curriculum time allocated to citizenship is used for topics or themes that do not meet National Curriculum objectives; for example slavery based mainly on historical study, and personal finance. Currently the curriculum is content-led and does not develop progressively the concepts and processes identified in the National Curriculum, albeit these are treated incidentally at times.
- Work has begun to promote continuity between Key Stages 3 and 4, although this is currently at the level of content coverage rather than in terms of students' progress and attainment.
- Schemes of work vary in quality, with some being very helpful to teachers but others heavily dependent on particular resources and with insufficient guidance on pedagogy.
- The school gives due weight to considering the implications of the revised National Curriculum for citizenship in other subjects, with evidence presented of considerable activity in aspects such as sustainability.
- In the broader life of the school students have excellent opportunities to participate and make an outstanding contribution to the school and community.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship is satisfactory.

- At a time of changing senior leadership, there is a continuing commitment to citizenship in both the ethos and the curriculum of the school.
- Citizenship and its host personal development programme have been brought into the humanities faculty and this is demonstrating positive impact in aspects such as monitoring and self-evaluation. The latest self-evaluation rightly identified the area of politics and government as a development priority. This demonstrates good capacity to improve.
- The monitoring of teaching is good and both joint lesson observations and self-evaluation largely agree with inspection findings.
- Subject leadership has been effective in some aspects of curriculum development and support for non-specialist teaching, but has not developed the full intentions of National Curriculum citizenship programmes.
- The department has had good access to sources of information and help, including a local initial teacher education provider, with the potential to develop these links further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the curriculum, as planned, to develop progression in the key processes and concepts of National Curriculum citizenship, ensuring that central citizenship content is given due weight

- revising schemes of work to provide a consistent basis for planning teaching and learning, especially to give support to the large number of non-specialists who teach citizenship
- devising assessment tasks and activities that challenge students and demonstrate progress in citizenship.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Scott Harrison
Additional Inspector