

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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Mr J McAtear
Headteacher
Hartismere School
Castleton Way
Eye
Suffolk
IP23 7BL

Dear Mr McAtear

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 December 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 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good with outstanding features.

- Students display very good understanding of key citizenship education concepts and respond well to the opportunities provided to apply these in practical ways. For example, an extremely high level of engagement with the local community enables students to identify social issues which are of concern to them and to instigate and run charitable events to support their cause.
- The level and quality of debate among students are outstanding. Students express their views and opinions clearly and confidently. Even when their ideas are not fully formed, students are at ease in contributing to classroom discussions.

- Most students have a good grasp of issues in the national and international news and display a critical attitude to the world around them. A minority, however, are detached and struggle to relate to the citizenship topics being considered.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good.

- Teaching in citizenship-related subjects is effective and conducted in a good-natured fashion. Teachers have high expectations of students and frame questions which enable students to demonstrate their ability well; tasks set are clearly explained.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers made seamless and relevant links, enabling students to relate aspects of the subject to topical issues. In English, a timely and relevant newspaper piece explored British cultural attitudes; a French lesson took a lively and engaging look at identity and diversity; and science teachers enabled students to discuss evidence about society's commitment to sustainability.
- Conversely, in the less effective examples, teachers lacked the vocabulary, depth of knowledge and confidence to sufficiently explore citizenship-related topics. For the same reasons, a few struggled to effectively incorporate controversial issues into lessons.
- Overall, the school has much experience in assessment, target-setting and reporting generally; instances were seen of effective peer assessment. In relation to citizenship education, however, assessment is insecure.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the curriculum in citizenship is good.

- The organisation of citizenship through a core personal, social, health citizenship and economic education programme (PSHCEE), linked subjects, the religious education GCSE and extensive community engagement is pragmatic and enables suitable coverage of the programme of study. The community dimension adds much to the development of students' citizenship-related skills.
- Opportunities for sixth form students to become involved in volunteering and create constructive extra-curricular opportunities for themselves are encouraged by the school and valued by students.
- External agencies work willingly with the school and provide support. Their involvement at times stems directly from students having made contact, thereby sharpening the application of students' citizenship skills.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship is good.

- The school has a specific aim of supporting young people to make a significant contribution to their community. Senior managers have ensured that ample opportunities exist for students to develop the skills, knowledge and aptitudes to meet this aim.
- Formal mechanisms are in place, such as school councils, which enable student involvement in making decisions. The school also succeeds in creating an ethos whereby students readily and voluntarily involve themselves in school and community life.
- Senior managers and citizenship subject leaders have previously undertaken a PSHCEE subject review and taken actions accordingly. They have a clear view about what needs to be done to bring about further improvement, for example, in relation to developing teachers' broad understanding of citizenship education, and access to up-to-date and relevant curricular resources. Plans to bring about these improvements, however, are less evident.
- The school is not sufficiently linked into professional citizenship networks which provide the potential to support subject leaders.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing opportunities to update the staff involved in citizenship education on its core concepts and processes
- reviewing assessment arrangements
- drawing on external subject support.

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

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector