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Mr Alan Hutchinson  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Hutchinson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Citizenship and English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Faysal Mikdadi on 1 and 2 of February 2007 to look at work in citizenship and English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of both subjects, the visit had a particular focus on provision for poetry and teaching and learning about Britain's diversity.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made in citizenship and English included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

### Citizenship

The overall effectiveness in citizenship is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are good.

- The college fosters students' self-esteem and confidence extremely well. Students in Year 9 are mature in outlook and overall their personal development is outstanding. Students are motivated and have extremely

good attitudes to learning and to each other. They are active partners in the learning process and their views are listened to. Citizenship makes a significant contribution to their values, attitudes and respect for others.

- In subjects which contribute to citizenship, students write well and at length and are able to synthesise and present arguments from research and distinguish bias in source material. Students are articulate and confident to express their views. Work in the core unit work books indicates variation in the extent of coverage of the unit and standards. While much work is rightly discussion based, where written work is undertaken it is more often in the form of brief notes and opportunities should be found for more extended and reflective writing.
- The student progress file is used well to track their college responsibilities and involvement in college and community activities.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching seen in subjects which contribute to citizenship was good and the impact of national strategies evident. Students are partners in the learning and engaged by the interesting work that they are asked to undertake.
- Because of the way the timetable is constructed and the timing of the visit it was not possible to see teaching of citizenship in the core life skills programme. Evidence from students' folders indicates that teaching is more variable in these sessions. That said, students reported that teaching in citizenship involves active approaches and discussion. For example, they talked at some length about the Fair Trade simulation that they had undertaken.
- The college currently assesses students against the end of Year 9 expectations and reports citizenship to parents as part of the life skills programme. Comments to parents are not precisely enough related to citizenship as a subject.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The programmes of study for citizenship are covered by a coherent set of core units. These are supplemented by work in other subjects which provide opportunities to explore specific relevant themes in depth. The specific contribution that subjects make to citizenship as a subject rather than overall life skills requires greater definition and precision across the college and subject-specific assessment should be extended to include assessment for citizenship. There are good opportunities within the college for students to take responsibility and participate in community activities. Specific citizenship days provide additional opportunities as do assemblies trips and visiting specialists

## Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are good.

- The leadership of the college has created very successfully a positive ethos which fosters students' individuality. Citizenship makes a good contribution to this ethos and has the potential to develop it further. The college has recently appointed a life-skills co-ordinator with specific responsibility of developing the subject. He has identified the specific work that needs to be undertaken and which is included within the college development plan. It is too soon to judge the impact of his work. The college's self-evaluation of the current state of development of citizenship is accurate and there is good capacity for improvement.

Subject issue: provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- The college extends students' cultural awareness well within citizenship and other subjects and has responded to the previous inspection report in this regard. There are specific units of work which tackle racism, examine slavery and the development of the civil rights movement in which students are able to respond in depth. Other work underpins the college's aims in developing respect for others and challenging stereo-types such as the work on disability awareness and attitudes to old age. The college is planning to seek school international award accreditation with the support of the student council. There are links being developed with a Kenyan and a Ugandan school.

## Inclusion

- The college is very inclusive and supports all students well. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well because their specific needs are addressed. Students have a mature understanding that some students find learning more difficult than others. Higher attaining students are provided with appropriate challenge.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sharpening the distinction across the college between work in 'life skills' and citizenship as a subject
- identifying with greater precision those subjects which make specific contributions to citizenship as a subject and map these into a coherent programme which is shared with students
- ensuring that subject specific assessment in contributory subjects is extended to include citizenship specific assessment
- monitoring the work of citizenship in the core life-skills programme to ensure consistent high standards.

## English

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be outstanding.

### Achievement & standards

Achievement and standards in English are good.

- Attainment in English on entry is average. Standards have risen since 2004 and attainment was above average at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2006, although the number of those attaining the higher level declined a little.
- PANDA CVA data indicate that achievement overall was good in 2005, a situation that was maintained in 2006.
- All students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) and those who have English as an additional language (EAL), achieve well in English.
- English provision adds considerable value to the students' education.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is outstanding.

- The English department enjoys the services of highly qualified teachers who have a singular passion for their subject. These factors contribute substantially to the students' good progress. Students come in with average prior attainment and with reading ages that are particularly low. Because of the outstanding teaching, students' attainment, by the time that they leave, is above average and current targets aim at making it well above average.
- Teaching observed during the inspection was consistently of high quality with many outstanding features. Students spoke highly of their teachers and of the provision made in English.
- Lessons are well planned and intelligently structured. Students are encouraged to work hard within a warm and business like atmosphere. There is a specific and successful focus on ensuring that students work independently and with confidence. Teachers also model much of what they want their students to do in all aspects of English, especially in writing.
- Teachers offer a variety of activities so that students remain interested and on task. This also helps to cater for differing abilities and aptitudes.
- Assessment is good. Students are able to speak confidently about their current levels, about what they need to do to improve their work further and about their targets. Both students and the English department recognise the one area for development in assessment: to set students precise targets that would give them the opportunities to see quick returns on their efforts (i.e. SMART targets).

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- Over the last two years the department has successfully overhauled its curriculum to ensure that students are not only prepared for national the tests. The consequence has been a rise in the number of students who like English. This has been paralleled by producing schemes of work that are well structured and that ensure fine progression.
- There is a good balance of activities and skills such that students are given ample opportunities to enhance their speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is supplemented by a strong enrichment programme that includes poets visiting the school, booster classes for the higher attainers, creative writing with this year's focus on poetry.
- The department has successfully ensured that its curriculum is fit for purpose by introducing works from other cultures with the specific aim of celebrating cultural diversity.

## Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are outstanding.

- The rising trend in results and the continuing improvements in standards are happening because of the strong focus on standards brought by the subject leader over the last two years. Until then the department had suffered an interregnum which caused the dip in the 2004 results. The significant improvement in 2005 has been continued in 2006.
- Senior leaders are fully supportive of the English department. They observe lessons, offer advice on the way forward and support the subject leader in the department's self evaluation. The department's link governor works closely both with staff as well as students whom she takes for writing sessions.
- Amongst the many improvements in the department over the last two years are the schemes of work and the excellent planning. Consequently, everyone in the department works within a team and with a strong sense of commitment to students' welfare and education.
- Departmental improvement plans show a clear understanding of areas for improvement.

## Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is outstanding.

- The work done by the department to encourage a love of poetry is exemplary. It includes students writing a huge variety of poems.
- Students enjoy work on poetry.

- Opportunities for students to write their own poems include the chance to put a personal anthology together which is then sent home for parents to read and comment on if they wished. Students speak highly of this work and display their poetry with pride.
- Teachers are passionate about poetry and several teachers in the department write poetry themselves.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in English is outstanding.

- The department's major strength is that it ensures that every student is included in its work. For example, LDD students seen were taking great delight in manipulating words and in discussing what they were doing. This kind of work was not substantially different from higher attaining students working with a bank of words from a well known poem in order to reproduce it in their own way. The department works creatively to include students all in its work.
- Inclusion is also enhanced by the variety of activities in each lesson, the effective support given to each individual student and the challenges used to push students on to higher planes. The result is that no group in this department underachieves.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- setting SMART short term targets in order to enable students to see evidence of progress made over short periods.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship and English in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Rod Passant  
Additional Inspector