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Mrs Caroline McKenney
Principal
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Dear Mrs McKenney

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and arrangements you made for me to meet a governor, local authority adviser and several staff, during my visit on 26 and 27 March 2007 to look at work in citizenship.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on provision for 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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

The overall effectiveness was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are good.

- Students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship by the time they reach Year 11 are above average. Their progress in developing

relevant skills is good. Standards of literacy are above average.

Teachers encourage them to think for themselves, reason and debate.

- The development of citizenship knowledge through Key Stage 3, while well-organised, is slow at first, because of the low allocation of time to the subject. Nonetheless, the knowledge and understanding of younger students are satisfactory, and sometimes better.
- Students in Key Stage 4 benefit from modules of learning in lessons which are weekly. They develop a good grasp of the expected areas of knowledge, have above-average skills of reasoning and a secure value-system, enabling them to consider and debate citizenship issues as mature young adults.
- Topics in other subjects such as religious education, history and science, extend knowledge and understanding gained in citizenship. For example, in a mixed ability Year 7 religious education lesson on Sikhism, students progressed well. They recalled accurately the meaning of symbols and interpreted sensitively information presented to make good gains in understanding the importance of community to Sikhs.
- Students gain understanding of how democracy works through elections and participation in their sports council (Key Stage 3) and the school council (in which all years are represented). Both have impact and are taken seriously by students, staff and governors.
- Achievement in practical citizenship is boosted for many through the school's strengths as a specialist sports college and in the awards given for arts activities. Records kept in subject areas show good participation, particularly for community sports activities in which about half the students are involved in each of Key Stages 3 and 4.
- The general studies course followed by all students in Year 12 enables sixth formers to build further on their knowledge and citizenship skills. Additionally, there is a high level of participation in the school community by taking part in projects with younger students.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students learn well in core citizenship lessons because relationships are good, teachers are well informed and provide interesting activities, with ample opportunity for discussion. Good use is made of excellent learning resources, including information and communication technology.
- Work is suitably challenging and teachers check for understanding in lessons. Self-assessment is used in some topics, but there is little formal assessment by the teacher, although helpful comments are reported to parents on the progress of individuals.
- Teaching and learning aspects of citizenship in other subjects are good. Students gain insights into social implications and how they can be influenced and managed to benefit people more widely.

- Students enjoy and are interested in the subject. While they readily state and justify views of their own, they also respect the views of others. Students all work together well.
- Students gain greatly from opportunities for practical citizenship. Students are given the freedom and support to exercise responsibility in projects and events that benefit others. Students are particularly proud of their successful management of the TOP Link sports festival, organised by Year 10 students for 250 children from local primary schools. Students are now looking forward to building links with China and acting as ambassadors, in preparation for the 2008 Olympics.
- All work seen has been safely conducted. Students learn about aspects of health education and provision in the United Kingdom and abroad.
- In the core citizenship programme, students' written work is slight. Generally they make short notes on topics in exercise books. Some individuals write at greater length, with feeling. However, students write extensively about relevant topics, such as the parliamentary system, in other subjects, but such opportunities have not been identified as citizenship or linked to the work they have done there.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Provision of one hour per fortnight jointly to citizenship and personal, social and health education through Key Stage 3, while barely adequate, is supplemented effectively by work across the curriculum and a particularly rich range of other opportunities. Provision of one hour per week in Key Stage 4 for citizenship and related subjects boosts learning considerably.
- The school is fortunate to benefit from outstandingly good planning for the citizenship curriculum, based on a framework developed by an adviser of the local authority. This is augmented by learning resources carefully selected for Netherhall students. Requirements for knowledge and understanding in citizenship are covered coherently and with progressive difficulty.
- Enrichment activities in citizenship are very good. Sports college initiatives feature strongly, also community activities in the arts, as well as the Duke of Edinburgh's award, the youth parliament and sports and school councils.
- Enterprise activities in Year 9 develop understanding of team work and labour markets, as well as international trade.
- In assemblies topical issues are covered, such as the abolition of the slave trade.

Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are good.

- Leadership of citizenship is good and reflects the commitment of the governing body to developing excellence within the school community. Governors take seriously the contributions of students. Their curriculum sub-committee receives presentations by students on particular topics.
- Management of core citizenship is good. The core curriculum and other initiatives are excellently documented. Staff deployment is good, with teachers working in specialist teams. However, there has been little planning for citizenship across the curriculum and no recent training for all staff on citizenship.
- Students' progress in citizenship is described in reports to parents but these summative comments are not based on systematic assessment of citizenship or on monitoring of students' participation in activities across the school. However, useful information is held by departments. For example, very good record keeping of sports college initiatives and participation in the arts award scheme, quantify participation in activities such as training for the junior sports leader award, and community arts initiatives.
- Planning for improvement is good. The citizenship plan acknowledges the need to identify opportunities for citizenship across the curriculum as well as the assessment of students' progress. The local authority adviser is providing excellent support materials including computer software to facilitate these developments.

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

Provision for teaching about Britain's diversity is good. Excellent curricular planning ensures that topics which advance awareness and understanding of British diversity are covered systematically in every year. Links with outside projects develop students' insights into the backgrounds and contributions of others as, for example, through Camcarib project.

Inclusion

The school is very inclusive. The ethos of the school is very open and egalitarian. Students from a wide range of backgrounds feel respected and happy in the school. Contributions in lessons and participation in the life of the school, for example, as a school councillor, reflect this diversity. Support is good for students who are at an early stage of learning to speak English and also for students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Students are keen to participate and help others. For example, some pupils in Year 10 on a vocational course have learned of a social inclusion project, and spend time there, helping young people from the most deprived wards in Cambridge to improve their own life chances.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- implementation of plans for the identification of citizenship across the curriculum, and for the systematic assessment of citizenship
- raising awareness of citizenship among all staff, through professional development.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship in the school.

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

Barbara Hilton
Additional Inspector