

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs A Dalglish
Headteacher
Longford Community School
Tachbrook Road
Feltham
Middlesex
TW14 9PE

Dear Mrs Dalglish

Ofsted survey inspection programme – citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 and 27 November 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of thirteen lessons, form time and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- The majority of Year 11 students took the half course GCSE examination in 2007. Results were above the national average and boys did considerably better than boys nationally.
- Students have a very good understanding of the key factual content of the National Curriculum for citizenship, particularly law and politics. They study the EU in depth, have a satisfactory knowledge of the Commonwealth but less insight into the functions and workings of the United Nations.

- The democratically-run school council is an effective voice for students to express their views on school issues. It directs many of the fund raising events and students are generous giving to charity. Council members see part of their role as being available to help students who need support.
- Students have keen debating skills and much enjoy discussing controversial issues.
- An increasing number of students are involved in voluntary work.
- A recycling group launched a 'Green week' and is taking the initiative to consider environmental issues in the local area.
- During each unit of study, students ICT use in citizenship lessons. Year 9 students researched and designed material on how to tackle homophobia.
- The school is aware that some students do not appreciate how reading newspapers or watching the news on television can enhance their appreciation of this subject.
- Self and peer assessment feature regularly in lessons. Reports meet statutory requirements in full.

Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding features.

- With the key learning objectives displayed throughout citizenship lessons, teachers use the interactive whiteboard extremely well with bright, clear information and photographs. They prepare all their own presentations as well as a wide range of exemplary materials.
- Information is as up-to-date as possible and linked to events to which students can relate such as the war in Iraq.
- Students are taught learning skills through work in many citizenship lessons.
- Teachers encourage students to remember work by recapping previous key points and having reminders half way through lessons.
- Lessons proceed at a punchy pace with starters ready as students walk in followed by several different, stimulating activities. However, in some lessons the amount of work covered is so much that students have limited time for discussion or reflection.
- Just occasionally teachers miss opportunities to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- All students study citizenship as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 11 and several students choose to study it in the sixth form. With increasing interest in the subject, some students are studying a full GCSE in sociology and A level sociology/citizenship in the sixth form.
- Significant contributions to students' appreciation of citizenship are made by other subjects, especially the humanities, science and drama but the last audit of cross-curricular citizenship was completed four years ago and does not reflect the present picture.

- Stimulating questions during lessons help students to see how citizenship issues impact on everyday life, for example "How does politics affect a journey to work?"
- Visits to venues such as the local magistrates' court and sessions taken by outside speakers bring the subject alive for students. For example a session explaining the legal system and how to prevent getting into crime.

Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Your conviction that citizenship is an essential subject for all students has been the driving force behind its development and success.
- The school has skilfully blended its focus on the Every Child Matters agenda with its development of citizenship.
- The appointment of four specialist citizenship teachers, one of whom is leading the subject well, has meant that the status of the subject is high and it is valued by all teachers.
- Training for the subject leader is giving her further expertise and confidence to develop growth in provision.
- The subject is well-funded.

Subject issue: teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- Students discuss what it means to be British with insight, confidence and reality. Older students can discuss sensitive topics such as the politics of extremism.
- The 'Being British' section in the citizenship course includes students considering definitions of 'patriotic' and 'social identity'. Several other subjects also address diversity issues. In religious education, for example, students examine the roots and cultures of their surnames.
- The school holds international evenings which are successful in celebrating the increasingly diverse school population.
- The school hosts an annual anti-racism football tournament.
- Year 7 students visit the Houses of Parliament.

Inclusion

- Students with English as an additional language receive excellent support which includes helping them to understand what being British means. Each term these students present a play and hold a party for their parents.
- Students entering the sixth form with little English are helped to take the International GCSE in English.
- Even though students are taught in sets, work is planned at different levels to match students' abilities in each citizenship class.
- In Year 7 students are taken on a tour of the local area with a governor and local resident. This contributes to projects on their identity within the local community.
- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well in class and participate fully in citizenship lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- carrying out an audit of contributions to citizenship from other subjects and helping students to appreciate their links with citizenship.

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/Learning Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Additional Inspector