

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



25 January 2008

Mr Simon Hill
Headteacher
Darton High School
Churchfield Lane
Darton
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S75 5EW

Dear Mr Hill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – citizenship and English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Susan Bowles HMI on 23 and 24 January 2008 to look at work in citizenship and English.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of citizenship, the visit had a particular focus on provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity. In the case of English the focus was on provision for independent learning.

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 lessons in both citizenship and English.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in citizenship

Achievement and standards in citizenship are good.

- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of key areas of the citizenship curriculum are satisfactory with good features at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Pupils' progress can be clearly identified within and

across key stages. Pupils are aware of their levels, grades and targets and what to do to reach them.

- Pupils' enquiry and communication skills are good, particularly in writing. They are encouraged to write extended pieces of work in citizenship and are expected to contribute orally in lessons; most take part in group discussions and debate. The development of oral communication skills is encouraged through speech-making, student council activities and formal debates in some lessons.
- Many pupils at the school are very good at participating and taking responsible action. Some have outstanding skills developed through their role on the student council and other activities within and beyond the school.

Quality of teaching and learning in citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning in citizenship is good.

- Teachers have specialist knowledge and good subject expertise. They are aware of how well the pupils are achieving and set them suitable targets. The best marking provides pupils with very detailed and helpful comments.
- Teachers use information and communications technology (ICT) to good effect to illustrate lessons and capture pupils' responses. Interactive whiteboards are used extensively to show video clips, play interactive games and pose questions.
- The regular citizenship events help pupils to learn actively in a range of unusual settings. These include the 'Prison, me? No way!' workshops and work with outside agencies such as Red Ladder, exploring issues of difference and prejudice. Teachers understand how to deal with sensitive and controversial issues and explicitly plan to address controversy in the curriculum.
- In a minority of lessons the pupils are passive rather than active learners and opportunities to ask question and develop their enquiry skills are not offered. Pupils, do however, enjoy citizenship lessons, even though they find some of the concepts challenging. Most recognise the value of the subject's contribution to a good preparation for life.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to undertake research through, for example, the student council School Travel Initiative surveys. Much of their research work is topical and related to real life issues.

Quality of the citizenship curriculum

The citizenship curriculum is good.

- The programme is taught discretely in years 8 and 9 and all pupils are entered for the short course GCSE in Key Stage 4. In Year 7, citizenship is taught as part of Skills for Learning. The overall programme is coherent and comprehensive at both key stages.
- The formal curriculum is well supplemented by 'citizenship days' and a wide range of community activities and the programme allows for good progress across the key stages.

- The school's Humanities specialism has had a very positive impact on citizenship. Funding from the Specialist Schools Trust has enabled the school to appoint a community citizenship coordinator and a specialist trained citizenship teacher. It has also partially funded one of the team to study for a Masters degree in citizenship and middle-leadership training for the subject coordinator.
- Citizenship is firmly at the centre of this school's vision and ethos. This is influencing thinking about future curriculum models and how, when the school is rebuilt, it should function to enable the vision to be realised.

Leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- Citizenship is very well supported by members of the senior leadership team who recognise its value and central position in the developing ethos of the school.
- Sufficient resources have been provided in terms of time, staff responsibility, training and materials. The quality of subject leadership is good. The subject coordinator works in close collaboration with the community coordinator, ensuring coherence of vision and practice.
- Subject planning is thoughtful and in line with up-and-coming developments in the subject. Schemes of work, lesson plans and materials are of a good quality and there is sharing of good practice. Standards of teaching are regularly monitored in the department and training is matched to identified needs.
- The school understands its own strengths and development needs in citizenship. With further senior leadership and Specialist Schools Trust support there is good capacity to further improve.

Subject issue: teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- The school tackles this issue particularly well at Key Stage 4 where the 'Day of Diversity' has had a very big impact on present Year 11 pupils. Similarly, the 'Refugees' day made an impact on the Year 8 students who attended.
- Pupils who have had access to these activities are able to articulate their views on issues such as asylum, culture and tradition and understand the connections with global politics and economics.
- Year 8 have undertaken some good classwork on identities and what it means to be British.

Inclusion

- The introduction of the COPE curriculum provides excellent opportunities for all pupils to achieve well in citizenship. For example, the Fire and Rescue Service training and associated coursework has proved highly motivating for a group of students with learning difficulties.

- Differentiated tasks and expected outcomes in lessons help to meet individual needs, although in some lessons the gifted and talented pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to express themselves orally.
- At Key Stage 4, those identified as underachieving in citizenship are invited to attend intervention lessons, although not all do so.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing diversity activities for all pupils in Key Stage 3.

English

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement in English is satisfactory and standards are broadly average.

- Attainment at the end of both key stages has been well below average in English for the past two years. Results in English literature have remained good. Following determined efforts, students' progress has recently begun to improve and is now broadly satisfactory, given their overall average starting points.
- Mock Key Stage 3 tests indicate a significant improvement and Key Stage 4 coursework is sound in quantity and quality.
- Pupils' attitudes towards English are mostly positive. Behaviour in lessons is usually good.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching in English varies widely, because of the range of experience and expertise in the team, a consequence of high turnover and recruitment difficulties.
- Typically, teachers form good relationships with pupils, set suitable – if broad - learning objectives, give clear explanations, encourage students to work cooperatively and independently, and offer them individual help. Some teachers need to plan more carefully to build on what students can already do and to use a wider range of strategies which challenge and actively involve them.
- The good and excellent lessons were characterised by the depth of planning for progression and continuous assessment of progress. Effective strategies were used to engage students in learning; rich questioning, skilful handling of class discussion about language, modelling, dramatic reading and the use of good quality resources to support individual and group work were notable features.
- Assessment procedures have been improved from a low base by the introduction of target sheets and more detailed feedback on progress for students, and special books for compiling assessed work. As a result, some students are beginning to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how to make progress. However, practice is not yet

consistent. Marking is not always helpful to pupils and some students' folders and books contain too little marked work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The newly re-organised curriculum provides sufficient breadth, balance and interest for young people. Resources are reviewed to ensure students are prepared well for national tests. To reflect students' interests, media studies has been added to an existing drama option at GCSE.
- The library / resource centre has encouraged boys' interest in reading, for example, through specially designed displays. Borrowing by boys currently slightly exceeds that of girls.
- Accommodation is poor, pending the rebuilding of the school, but resources, whether printed or electronic, are good.
- Part of the English curriculum in Year 7 is taught within a "Skills for Learning" programme, an aspect of the school's plan to raise achievement through the humanities, its specialism. The work done by the students indicates good development of literacy and independent learning skills.

Leadership and Management of English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory with good features.

- The subject self evaluation demonstrates very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of English, and significant changes have begun to make a difference to students' progress, if not yet consistently. There is a strong focus on raising achievement quickly.
- The local authority is supporting evaluation and professional development well, though it has not been able to help with recruitment.
- An appropriate plan of action is being implemented as swiftly as possible, given problems in recruiting specialists. A member of the senior leadership team is acting as curriculum leader and a new advanced skills teacher has a brief to raise achievement in English. Their concerted efforts have helped the committed teaching team to develop a sharper understanding of expectations, though there is some way to go before they are consistently fulfilled.
- Monitoring for all teachers in the team is systematic but needs to lead to on-going guidance on how to improve teaching and learning.

Independent learning in English

The quality of independent learning is satisfactory.

- Promising examples of independent enquiry were seen in the work of students in Year 7 who are experiencing the new "Skills for Learning" programme. More generally in English lessons teachers vary widely in

their use of strategies to encourage pupils to take independent responsibility.

- Some teachers tend to do most of the talking in lessons and to set narrowly prescriptive questions and tasks. Others help students to develop their confidence in posing their own research questions and exploring their own ideas.
- Only a minority of students spoken to were interested in independent reading; the encouragement of adults who suggest authors or books has been influential on them.
- Extra activities and the availability of information and communication resources have encouraged a few students to publish their independent writing for a wider audience.

Inclusion

Inclusion is improving and is now satisfactory.

- Recent underperformance has affected nearly all groups of students. New monitoring arrangements enable earlier identification of those not making the expected progress and interventions are now in place to boost progress before national tests or examinations.
- The department successfully enters the great majority of pupils for both English and English Literature at GCSE. There are smaller groups for those making slower progress, and to date those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have achieved in line with expectations.
- Too few with higher prior attainment have reached the highest levels or grades. New grouping by ability aims to rectify this and interim test results for Year 9 show a promising increase in the numbers reaching higher levels.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve planning so that lessons build on what students can already do and challenge everyone in the class
- ensure consistency in assessment
- extend the effectiveness of monitoring and the sharing of good practice.

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

As we explained in our 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

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector