

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr R Sullivan  
Headteacher  
Castle View School  
Meppel Avenue  
Canvey Island  
Essex  
SS8 9RZ

Dear Mr Sullivan

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship and mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 14 and 15 July 2008 to look at work in citizenship and mathematics.

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.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus in each subject. We looked at provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity in citizenship, and the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics.

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.

## Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students display good underpinning knowledge and are able to articulate their own views and formulate questions. They understand and appreciate the dilemmas which invariably arise in citizenship education. For example, Year 10 drama students responded thoughtfully whilst role playing situations of religious bigotry in Northern Ireland. They succeeded in illustrating how deep-rooted community tensions impinge upon everyday teenage relationships.

- Clear distinctions exist between key stages and students are generally able to describe how well they are progressing. GCSE results have improved over the two years of the short course's existence.
- Students have a good knowledge base appropriate to their year of study. They display knowledge on the criminal justice system and the workings of parliament. Members of the school council have learned much about democratic processes and decision making.
- Communication and enquiry skills are good, for example through students surveying family members on current issues. Such activities support the development of research skills and help students to express better informed views. However, examples of in depth writing by students are too limited.
- Learning through students' 'participation and responsible action' is not given sufficient emphasis. Students, across all years, do not engage sufficiently well with the notion of the 'active questioning citizen'.

### Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students are responsive and actively engage with the subject. They report recent improvements and speak well of those citizenship classes where teachers create the right environment for discussion. They view such discussions as 'time well spent'. Although at an early stage, consideration is being given to the additional needs of gifted and talented students.
- The better teaching is topical and the content relevant. It is underpinned by teachers' good general knowledge. Led by the head of department, teachers have developed their expertise in the subject. Any weaknesses are due largely to inexperience and levels of confidence.
- Sensitive and controversial issues are handled 'head on', a point which students both noted and appreciated. In many discussions, teachers set questions appropriate to the differing levels and abilities of students. In Year 10 law and Year 7 citizenship lessons, teachers confidently varied their lesson plans to include current news items or the response of the group.
- Marking of work is good with teachers often indicating students' working levels and raising points for consideration by individuals.
- Progress on assessment and reporting is satisfactory. Reports include an observation about the pupil's classroom contribution and effort but are too general in their assessment of the quality of their written work.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- All Key Stage 4 students follow the GCSE Citizenship short course which has helped give the subject shape and coherence. The subject is well rooted but not sufficiently distinguished from personal, social and health education. Creative developments in the subject are rightly being considered in the light of new Key Stage 3 curriculum.

- A helpful list of topics spanning each term is in place to support teaching but there is no scheme of work to underpin the subject, particularly in relation to its cross-curricular element. End of year examinations help to consolidate learning.
- A very good range of resources has been collated including model lesson plans, video-linked footage and PowerPoint presentations. An on-line news link enables teachers to draw on the latest national and international news for use in the classroom. All of these assist non-specialist teachers; some are now confidently planning their own lessons to good effect.
- The school magazine, Castle Connections, promotes citizenship well along with other subjects. The magazine raises awareness among parents and presents the subject in a lively and relevant manner.

## Leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- Castle View has a clear vision for citizenship and actively promotes its young citizens in the community.
- The subject has made good progress in a short time principally due to the leadership of the head of department and support of the head of faculty. Involvement in local authority networking and professional development has helped embed the GCSE and the subject more generally.
- Subject leaders are self critical; the faculty self assessment is largely accurate and also sets out areas for development in respect of citizenship. Managers carry out periodic observations of teaching which assists them in forming a view about quality. Capacity for further improvement is good.
- The citizenship team has become smaller and better defined. Its location within the humanities faculty ensures synergy with allied subjects. However, teachers have had insufficient opportunity to undertake joint planning or staff development essential to continued improvement.

## Subject issue: teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- Diversity is a common strand across all humanities subjects and features highly in much of the school's planning. Staff generally take a strong and consistent approach to promoting diversity in their teaching and in their day to day relationships with students. Heads of department acknowledge that greater attention is given to understanding issues which help promote tolerance than previously, a response to the ill-considered and sometimes erroneous views expressed by students in the past on subjects such as migration. There are good citizenship curriculum resources on racism and diversity.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the need for increased support and further professional development for all teachers involved in the delivery of citizenship education
- refining teacher assessment and reporting
- introducing a more detailed scheme of work.

## Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards in mathematics

Standards are average but achievement is good.

- Standards in mathematics are continuing to improve. The school's Year 11 assessment records indicate that standards are now slightly above average, having been a little below average in 2007. While this is partly explained by higher prior attainment in the current year group, progress has also improved and is now good in Key Stage 4. Progress is satisfactory in Key Stage 3. In the lessons observed during this inspection, progress was typically good or close to good.
- The school's overall GCSE performance has hovered close to the government's 'floor target' of at least 30% of students achieving five passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics. Standards in English are lower than in mathematics where the majority of students are gaining at least grade C.
- Performance targets for individual students play an important role in the guidance and intervention programmes. Students are well aware of their target minimum grades.
- The recent introduction of the *Mathletics* programme has had a remarkable impact on students' motivation to improve their mathematical skills. Students can test their skills in competition with other students from all over the world and this has aroused their competitive instincts. The school is at an early stage of knowing how best to exploit this enthusiasm.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching and learning is well organised and usually well planned. Typical lessons involve an orderly start; an introductory activity linked to the main learning objective; a detailed explanation or demonstration of a new technique; plenty of opportunity for students to work through exercises to consolidate learning; and a discussion of what has been covered.
- This teaching approach enables students to make good progress in tests and examinations because it is supported by a strong programme of revision. However, it does not equip students to use and apply mathematics independently because it does not promote understanding well enough.
- Students gain a satisfactory level of understanding but teachers do not normally plan additional activities that might add to students' conceptual development. Sometimes teachers wrongly assume that students understand the purpose of the mathematics they are learning. Consequently, they do not always explain the motivation for the methods they are teaching.
- Teachers are good at moving round the classroom to gather information about students' learning while they work. However, teachers' ability to adapt lessons in the light of this assessment is variable because of their different levels of subject and pedagogical knowledge.

- Teachers are keen to develop their teaching skills. Those who were observed a second time had responded well to the initial feedback by putting more emphasis on thinking skills and justification in their lessons.
- In one lesson where many of the class had learning difficulties, students were genuinely excited by their first taste of the highly engaging *Mathletics* software. One pupil told the head of department 'I'm sorry, but I've won a *Mathletics* certificate. I didn't mean to, but I got addicted.'

## Quality of the curriculum

The mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work for mathematics are based on a commercial scheme in Key Stage 3 and on awarding body guidance in Key Stage 4. The school's curriculum planning does not develop using and applying mathematics in an organised, consistent way. Some teachers use investigative approaches sometimes.
- Access to information and communication technology (ICT) for staff and students is satisfactory but few opportunities arise to take a whole class into an ICT room. Much homework is now set online, and students who have internet access out of school can also join in their spare time with the *Mathletics* programme.
- The most able students are offered GCSE Statistics in after-school provision. However, relatively few get the top grades in GCSE mathematics that would prepare them well for further study.
- Learning support is insufficiently focused on meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties. On occasion, they are supported to work at a level of mathematics that they do not understand, rather than having the gaps in their knowledge identified and addressed.

## Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The leadership of the mathematics department has been low-key but effective in improving standards. Revision sessions, which students attend after school and in the holidays, have played an important role. The profile of mathematics has risen too and most students now enjoy the subject.
- Good line management of mathematics is clearly evident. Senior leaders have played an important part in recruiting teachers and trainees to maintain the strength of the department following two retirements.
- Monitoring and evaluation is satisfactory in general terms. The head of department's subject expertise allows her to identify specific mathematical issues about the teaching approaches used. She provides good support for less experienced teachers, but not systematic guidance.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- The impact of professional development is evident in the increasing use made of interactive whiteboards.

- Good support from more experienced teachers coupled with an Open University course are helping an instructor to improve her teaching by focusing more effectively on helping students to understand, use and apply mathematics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- focusing departmental leadership more explicitly on improving teachers' ability to teach students to think for themselves in mathematics, linking this to a greater emphasis in lesson observations on mathematical details that affect teaching and learning
- strengthening teachers' knowledge of mathematics and how students learn it, for example through a systematic review of the schemes of work
- increasing the proportion of students who gain A and A\* grades in GCSE mathematics by challenging them to think more for themselves.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship and mathematics 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tony Gallagher  
Stephen Abbott  
Her Majesty's Inspectors