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Dear Mrs Everett

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 September 2008 to look at work in citizenship.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of citizenship, the visit had a particular focus on assessment.

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, observation of nine lessons, an assembly and several advisory (tutor group) sessions and a visit to the Art Gallery.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good with many outstanding features.

Introduction

I was grateful for your explanation of the school's approach to teaching citizenship through the use of almost 90, small 'advisories' of students from Years 7 to 13, grouped together in five 'learning communities' and meeting with their tutors three times a week for 45 minutes. I note that, during an Ofsted inspection in May 2007, the lead inspector commented that these tutor sessions were 'pure applied citizenship of a very high quality'.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- All students take short course GCSE in citizenship. Results have improved in the last few years with over 75% achieving A*-C grades in 2008, with one in four attaining A*/A grades - well above the national average. The gap between boys' and girls' results was smaller than that seen nationally.
- Students regularly research and debate social and current affairs issues in advisory sessions. Their knowledge of a wide range of topical events and issues is excellent. The range of issues considered is wide, for example public broadcasting, immigration to the UK, racial extremism and the credit crunch.
- A strength of the advisories is in group work but more emphasis needs to be given to individual enquiry and communication.
- Recently, a 'Democracy in Action' event gave students the chance to pose questions to six local councillors. Students appreciate the importance of voting having studied and debated democracy in advisory sessions.
- A few students interview applicants for teaching posts at the school and are trained to observe new teachers and give them feedback. Students' views are sought regularly on all aspects of school life and Student Voice (council) is very strong in the school and in the local community.
- Each advisory, or sometimes a whole learning community, chooses a charity to support. Students are aware of the role and impact of fund raising and imaginative in their methods (for example, making and marketing chutney, linked to enterprise learning), with benefits for charities, ranging from local to global.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching in GCSE citizenship is at least satisfactory with some good and outstanding lessons. Schemes of work are thorough, materials are well prepared, coursework is organised tightly and discussions are encouraged. For example, during a successful lesson on human rights, students ranked the importance of different rights and had to justify their opinions.
- A strong feature of citizenship lessons and advisories is the focus on topical issues. For example, teachers often provide newspapers as a resource for the topic being discussed, for example criminal and civil law.
- Advisories regularly prepare presentations using computers and teachers encourage students to use the Internet to research citizenship topics.
- Sixth formers are able to build on their prior learning in citizenship. For example, in general studies, students used an online questionnaire relating to political issues and opinions.

- Some good teaching on citizenship themes was seen in other subjects. For example, in an excellent information communication technology (ICT) lesson pupils learned how the media can manipulate images in order to influence the audience.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding

- The school rightly observes that citizenship has a valued place in the curriculum. To focus advisories' work, the head of department has structured the curriculum into nine units, spread over three years. She has written imaginative and interesting units of work.
- In all years, students study all the requirements of the National Curriculum, some in depth. Complementing students' consideration of Britishness, the theme of multiculturalism in the autumn term 2007 culminated in each advisory preparing a display about a country of their choice. Parents and members of the local community were invited to see them.
- Sixth form students articulate how citizenship features in many other subjects, for example ethical issues in ICT and science, human rights and racism in religious education and many topics in geography. However, younger students did not show the same awareness of how citizenship links to the broader curriculum.
- Good subject links can be found in geography, where Year 7 students consider West Kent's links with the rest of the world and extend this by studying globalisation in Year 9.
- The school uses its art gallery very well to promote citizenship, reflecting its visual arts specialism. Recent displays include significant political and ethical messages.
- Reflecting members of its community, the school prepared a DVD and learning materials about travellers for its own and other schools' use and the art gallery has held exhibitions about them.
- The citizenship curriculum benefits from the school's strong links with two schools in Tanzania. Students are aware of the issues facing the families of children in these schools including health problems such as HIV, malaria and death rates in childbirth.
- In the past the school had a Green Team but its work on the environment and sustainability has lost impetus in recent years.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are outstanding.

- You and members of the senior leadership team support citizenship enthusiastically, promote it through stimulating assemblies and keep a watchful eye on how it is incorporated into advisory sessions.
- Although citizenship was taught as a discrete subject prior to 2006, you acknowledge that provision was patchy. Since then you have developed an innovative and very successful way of delivering the subject, through the advisories, complemented by all students taking short course GCSE.

- The fact that Year 11 students feel they are being 'prepared for future life' reflects the success of your strategies to deliver citizenship.
- Your experienced, knowledgeable head of department for citizenship has structured new schemes of work very well in the light of the 2008 National Curriculum.
- You value the professional development of staff and run helpful training and support sessions to increase their confidence to deliver citizenship through advisories.

Subject issue: assessment

- The head of department has written some helpful citizenship level descriptors in student-friendly language. All members of staff have received training and copies are pinned up in all classrooms.
- You acknowledge that you have work to do to report the new assessment levels to parents. You have made a very good start and expect students to use the level descriptors for self-evaluation in December.
- With most advisories producing written work in groups, usually on computers, you realise that it will be challenging to gather firm evidence to assess individual students' progress and levels.
- You receive useful feedback from advisory tutors on the effectiveness of particular topics and approaches and are helping them to see how students' enquiry and participation skills are interwoven.
- GCSE coursework is assessed regularly and monitored tightly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reinforcing the contribution other subjects make to younger students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship by encouraging teachers to emphasise the links
- rekindling students' awareness of environmental issues within the school and in the local community
- ensuring that your advisory tutors have a range of evidence to support their assessment of students' levels of work at the end of this term.

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 local Learning and 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