

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr J Morgan
Headteacher
Conyers School
Green Lane
Yarm
TS15 9ET

Dear Mr Morgan

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 14 and 15 October 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons, a student council meeting and tutorial sessions.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students are fully involved and interested in the local and wider communities and are eager to discuss their learning in citizenship.
- Students have good knowledge of the key areas of the citizenship curriculum and both their oral and written work is good. Students relish the opportunities for discussion and debate.
- Students develop good research skills and use information and communication technology (ICT) very well.

- Students' participation in active citizenship is very good. Students in every year group willingly engage in local and national events. Recent examples include Year 11 students helping to renovate a local community centre as part of the first focus day on active citizenship.
- Members of the democratically elected school council speak eloquently about their achievements and the difference they make in school.
- Students know their voice is heard both through the school council and the recently launched 'Talkspace' blog in which students can express views about school. Students know that their opinions matter.
- Your fortnightly question and answer session allows representatives from every tutor group to put their questions to you.
- Provision for citizenship in the sixth form is outstanding. Sixth form students are confident, articulate and interested in the world around them. A substantial number of students in Year 12 will be entered for the AS Citizenship examination in 2009. All students participate in general studies and citizenship lessons and take part in a wide range of enrichment activities. 26 students are completing an Extended Project, many of them on citizenship themes.
- The students make a major contribution to the school by taking on roles such as sixth form counsellors and peer mentors. They speak of their appreciation of being able to give something back to the school and to contribute to its ongoing improvement.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is lively, engages the students through a wide range of strategies and provides plenty of opportunities for reflection and discussion.
- Information is as up to date as possible and lessons are sufficiently flexible to take account of local and national events.
- Teachers encourage students to research their own ideas and use ICT effectively to present their evidence. Students are challenged to become independent learners with a strong emphasis on investigation and evaluation.
- Teachers have expert knowledge. Lessons move at a good pace and relationships are excellent based on mutual respect and a strong sense of community.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in citizenship lessons and so are able to take a full and active part.
- Assessment is satisfactory and improving. The school is trialling a new system of assessment which will ensure that students receive quality feedback not only on their written work but also on their participation in active citizenship. Students receive good feedback on how to improve their skills in citizenship.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The school has recently evaluated its provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education and has developed a new approach and increased the time available for citizenship education and activities.
- Significant contributions are made by other subjects across the curriculum and all departments plan their lessons to include citizenship objectives. However, students are not always aware of which elements in lessons have a citizenship dimension.
- The school has an innovative and creative approach to citizenship with a strong focus on skills and participation.
- Citizenship is taught as a discrete subject within daily tutorial time in Years 7-11. In addition, in Years 9, 10 and 11 all students study GCSE religious education and aspects of the citizenship curriculum are taught here.
- Citizenship is planned to enable the revisiting of topics in greater depth as students progress through the school.
- The school's specialist status as a maths and computing college has been beneficial in developing excellent creative new ways to promote citizenship, such as the Talkspace blog.
- The school's recent achievement of Level 1 of the International School's Award demonstrates your commitment to developing stronger international links and promoting global citizenship. Students already have many opportunities to benefit from trips abroad. One sixth form student described her visit to Auschwitz as 'overwhelming.'
- From this academic year the school is providing six citizenship focus days in which students in every year group can participate in a range of activities which will usually includes an aspect of active citizenship. For example in October some students worked at re-painting the local community centre. In November students will visit 20 local care homes.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- Your response to the last Ofsted inspection shows a genuine commitment to promoting and improving citizenship.
- The subject co-ordinator has worked effectively with senior leaders to develop and enhance provision. Planning is excellent.
- Subject leaders across the curriculum regard the development of citizenship as a priority and provide creative opportunities for students to develop knowledge, skills and expertise.
- Senior managers and curriculum leaders effectively monitor the quality of teaching and learning and support staff wherever necessary and provide regular training.
- The capacity to improve is good because of the central place given to citizenship within the redesigned curriculum.

Subject issue: assessment

- Records are kept which provide indicators of achievement and progress. Nevertheless, many students are not able to say how well they are doing in citizenship.
- A new system is under development which will assess students' contribution to active citizenship.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop assessment procedures so that students have a clearer understanding of how well they are doing in citizenship
- help students to understand the links between core citizenship provision and citizenship elements within other subjects.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw
Additional Inspector