

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



08 December 2008

Mr N Stonehouse
Headteacher
The Phoenix School
Manor Road
Dawley
Telford
Shropshire
TF4 3DZ

Dear Mr Stonehouse

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 3 and 4 December 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation and reports, analysis of students' work, observation of part of nine lessons, one tutor session, an after school activity and meetings with four groups of students.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Students' knowledge and understanding of key areas of the citizenship curriculum at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory. In particular, they demonstrate good knowledge of human rights and responsibilities and crime and punishment. By Key Stage 4, progress accelerates and is good. Students' written work at Key Stage 4 is of a good standard; the move to enable all Year 10 students to study a full course in citizenship has sharpened the focus considerably and raised the significance of the subject for students. Students demonstrate good skills in enquiry and communication and contribute well in discussion and debate. They appreciate working with

their peers in pairs and groups and listening to different viewpoints. Some teachers note these contributions carefully and record them for assessment purposes but this is inconsistent at present.

- Students write extensively on aspects of citizenship in other subjects, for example in science and geography, but the school has not yet found a way to recognise this in citizenship assessment procedures.
- The commitment to engage students in active citizenship and develop the use of the student voice is excellent. This is fundamental to the school's belief in the importance of responsible citizenship. Students are encouraged to assume a range of leadership roles in school and many do so, gaining richly in terms of their personal development. There are extensive opportunities to assume responsibility through a wide range of opportunities such as prefect duties, mentoring and support of younger students, acting as librarians, sports leaders, and being part of the school's Eco Group. This service dimension adds much to the inclusive, supportive nature of the school.
- The student council is a model of excellent practice and has made considerable impact on school life. Students are proud that their views are taken into account in informing the school's priorities. They play a full and active part in school issues and in the local area, where they are often requested to contribute to interviews for senior authority appointments or engage in a variety of youth matters. In school, they have changed the nature of the school meals service, influenced school policies such as uniform decisions, appointments to the school and are involved in planning the design of their new school building. They are increasingly becoming involved in feedback about teaching and learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers are enthusiastic and well organised in planning their work in citizenship. They demonstrate clear commitment to the subject. Learning objectives are clear to students in lessons. When lessons incorporate topical issues of interest or concern and ensure the subject is relevant for students, they are most successful.
- Relationships between staff and students are warm and supportive. The comment from one Year 9 student, 'teachers care about you here- and want you to succeed', typifies students' views. They are positive about the subject. They enjoy decision making and problem solving and many display confidence in expressing their views.
- Most teachers deal with potentially controversial issues with confidence. They establish suitable ground rules for discussions and enable students to explore different viewpoints.
- Some marking in the subject is detailed and informative for students. However, this is inconsistent at present and guidance for inexperienced staff would improve this.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by some teachers to support teaching and learning. However, this is inconsistent across the subject.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features.

- Recent adaptation to curriculum delivery has resulted in a reduced team of staff delivering the subject. Prior to this, form tutors delivered the programme. The scheme of work for both key stages is satisfactory, regularly reviewed and meets statutory requirements. However, the programme is constrained, due to the demands of teaching both citizenship and PSHE in the sole period available. The school is aware of this and has plans to revise provision for both subjects to enable better coverage.
- The aspects covered most effectively are human rights and responsibilities, crime and punishment and diversity. Less attention is paid to politics or the EU and the Commonwealth and Britain's position in relation to both.
- The informal curriculum is excellent with the school ethos and atmosphere actively reinforcing the importance of citizenship for all students.
- Resources are usually relevant and promote purposeful discussions. There is effective use of ICT in some lessons, but this is inconsistent across all classes.
- Good contributions are evident from a wide range of subjects, although these contributions require closer mapping to avoid duplication. Links with a range of external agencies and partners are extensive in PSHE but less frequent in citizenship.
- The curriculum is inclusive and those with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities are sensitively supported to enable their full participation in lessons and extra-curricular opportunities.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- The vision from the senior leadership team is clear and has driven significant developments and recent improvements in the subject. Recent changes to subject delivery have been successful. The school has moved to a smaller, more specialist team in preference to using form tutors to deliver the subject. A subject leader is due to be appointed in 2009. GCSE citizenship at Key Stage 4 has recently been introduced.
- Despite the fact that there is currently no middle team leader with responsibility for the subject, the co-ordination and leadership of the subject is good. It speaks volumes that, despite the inevitable pressure to improve English and mathematics at GCSE, the leadership team has also pressed forward to improve citizenship as a priority. A good foundation has been achieved in establishing the schemes of work for each year group. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for citizenship understands the requirements for the subject, has a clear vision of the value and contribution to every student's education and has ensured that the programmes for both PSHE and citizenship are covered within the curriculum time available.
- There is clear recognition of the need to expand provision to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are fully covered. The school's development

plans for the subject are ambitious, but realistic and the school is on course in implementing their agreed action plan.

- Monitoring and evaluation of the subject is currently completed by the Year Leaders for each year group. This will improve in line with whole school processes with the appointment of a subject leader and has the potential to raise further the status of the subject and promote greater consistency in terms of the quality of teaching and learning across each year group.

Subject issue: assessment

- Assessment in the subject is good. Objectives are defined for each lesson and students' work and progress in the subject is monitored and recorded by teaching staff, although this could be developed further to include more formal assessments of verbal contributions in lessons.
- Reports to parents are informative and provide clear information about the subject content and their child's understanding and participation in lessons.
- The school understands the new assessment requirements and is currently introducing the eight level scale into Year 7. Work at Key Stage 4 is carefully marked and accurately assessed.
- Self and peer assessment are used well in some lessons to good effect but this is under-developed at present.
- The use of assessment to routinely inform teaching and learning is less well developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the range and variety of lesson resources, particularly the use of ICT in some lessons
- ensuring that non-specialist staff who contribute to the subject are supported in developing their understanding of the key processes of citizenship so that lessons are fully effective
- ensuring that all aspects of the subject are covered in sufficient depth.

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 Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector