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Miss J Burns  
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Dear Miss Burns

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 and 6 May 2009 to look at work in citizenship.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the development of students' political understanding.

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 five lessons, a lunchtime club and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are outstanding.

- Students demonstrate sophisticated levels of understanding in all key areas of the curriculum. They have a very good attitude to the citizenship which they view as essential in helping them develop the skills and understanding they will need for their future as citizens.
- Students have developed excellent skills in enquiry, communication and critical thinking. This is demonstrated by their ability to debate and discuss complex and controversial issues in a mature and well informed manner. Students' exceptional skills in advocacy and representation are honed through the many opportunities they have to lead projects and influence school policy.

- All students feel consulted with, and represented by, the very effective college council. This highly inclusive body works in close collaboration with other student groups such as the sports council, friendship and homework groups. The school's excellent inclusion policy is well evidenced in the democratic spirit of the school which ensures that all voices are heard and all opinions considered.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to very good effect to raise standards. Teachers utilise interactive whiteboard technology in lessons to add pace, challenge and interest. By accessing well selected web-sites, teachers bring topical debates and current issues into the classroom. Students access ICT to research topics and present their findings. Many students reported how they enjoyed logging onto the school web-site to express their views or stay in touch with college council activities.
- Planning for differentiation in lessons and good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that all achieve equally well in citizenship. Students from a very wide range of abilities benefit from the excellent and well attended lunchtime Philosophy for Children (P4C) club where they develop their thinking and debating skills in a fun and inclusive atmosphere.

#### Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Most teachers are specialists or have received high quality in-house training. As a result they demonstrate expert knowledge and understanding of citizenship and how it should be taught.
- Teachers use a wide range of participative approaches such as role play, visual aids and artefacts, simulation, group work, structured debate and discussion. Questioning is used very effectively to develop students' critical thinking skills. Skilful questioning enables teachers to set appropriate levels of challenge for individual students.
- Teachers are highly skilled in dealing with sensitive and controversial issues. Effective and well respected ground rules enable teachers and students to explore contentious issues in an atmosphere of emotional safety.
- Through well developed assessment systems, teachers are able to ascertain how well students are progressing in citizenship and what support is required. All students undertake assessed pieces of work which are graded and moderated. The marking of students' work is very good. Teachers set high expectations and offer helpful comments so that students know what they need to do to improve.

#### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- There is a core programme for citizenship. Lessons are discrete and well supported by teaching in other subject areas such as geography, science, English, history and religious education. Statutory

requirements are fully met and all aspects of the National Curriculum citizenship programme of study are included.

- Students can fluently describe how aspects of teaching in citizenship lessons contribute to, and are supported by, other subject studies and extra-curricular opportunities. Year 11 students spoke with enthusiasm about their visit to the Palace of Westminster and described the links with their own campaigning during mock elections in citizenship lessons and their knowledge of the struggle for universal suffrage in history. The programme is further enhanced by assemblies and special events such as the 'Social Harmony' day and the 'Big Debate' where students questioned their local MP.

## Leadership and management of citizenship

The quality of leadership and management of citizenship is outstanding.

- The school has a clear vision for citizenship which is understood at all levels of leadership and management. It is represented well in policy and development planning at both a whole school and a subject level.
- Sufficient resources have been allocated in terms of time, staff responsibility, staffing, training and materials. Most teachers at Key Stage 3 have had specialist training and other contributors receive in-house training during designated departmental meeting times. There is a dedicated teaching room for citizenship with interactive whiteboard technology, displays around the school and good student access to ICT.
- The subject leader discharges her role very well. Improvement planning is thorough, challenging and well informed by self-evaluation and review. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in citizenship includes book and planning scrutiny, lesson observations and student evaluations.
- The good support of the senior leadership team, combined with the hard work, dedication and skills of the subject leader suggests the department has excellent capacity to improve further.

Subject issue: the development of students' political understanding.

- Political understanding is very well provided for in the curriculum. Currently students study local government and community, central government and the Houses of Parliament in Year 7 and return to study government and democracy, economics, taxation and the European Union in Years 10 and 11.
- These understandings are much enhanced by opportunities for students to debate topical issues in citizenship and in other subjects. For example, students reported how they have opportunities to discuss the war in Iraq in geography and the politicisation of the media in English.
- Students' understanding of the principles of democracy are reinforced by active learning in Year 10 that requires them to form their own political parties, campaign and stand for election on a published manifesto, and vote in an election. Twenty one students in Year 10 had the opportunity to visit the Houses of Parliament in 2008 and debate

with their local representative. Students have some understanding of the different political parties and of the diverse groups that lobby parliament.

- Form representatives are democratically elected as are college counsellors. All students have a thorough understanding of democratic systems in Britain and are able to articulate their views on political systems in other states such as Zimbabwe and China. Students demonstrate a good understanding of the role of the media in influencing political opinion and are clear about their own rights to express an opinion, in the press or through the ballot box.
- Students' developing awareness and interest in political issues is reflected in the fact that a good number intend to pursue studies in politics, sociology and theology at Post 16 and most college council members expressed a desire to become an elected representative in adult life.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the time allocation for citizenship in Years 8 and 9 to match that in Years 7, 10 and 11
- developing citizenship links with partner primary schools.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship in the college.

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

Janet Palmer  
Her Majesty's Inspector