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Dear Mr Hughes

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 10 and 11 June 2009 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 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students have very good knowledge and understanding of key areas of the citizenship curriculum. They are particularly strong on human rights, politics, racism and sustainable development. Mock GCSE results indicate that students are expected to achieve well in their examinations next year.
- Students' skills of enquiry and communication are also good. Students are given excellent opportunities to develop their research and independent learning skills. The curriculum strongly emphasises critical

thinking and encourages debate and discussion of a wide range of topical issues. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have full access to the citizenship programme and receive good support to help them achieve well.

- All students have the opportunity to participate and take responsible action in citizenship contexts through the Learning for Life programme. However, opportunities for students to engage in further active citizenship, advocacy and representation are sometimes limited to small groups. For example, the school and sixth form council leaders have the power to co-opt others onto the council committees, resulting in the same small group leading on initiatives. Furthermore the remits of the councils are limited and students do not feel there is a forum for them to make suggestions about aspects of school life that fall outside the remits.
- Students' progress in citizenship is regularly assessed and can be identified within and between key stages. In Key Stage 3 the school has introduced the 8 level scale of assessment and in Key Stage 4 students are assessed to the requirements of the short course GCSE.
- Students in the sixth form have too few opportunities to further their knowledge and understanding in citizenship unless they are studying social science courses. There are some opportunities for active citizenship through volunteering and charity fund-raising but the learning outcomes of these activities are not evaluated. The school has rightly identified this as a priority for development.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The department benefits greatly from a team of specialist trained teachers who bring expertise and enthusiasm to the subject. Students enjoy lessons and their work and behaviour meet teachers' expectations. However, sometimes expectations are too low and teachers miss opportunities to challenge students' thinking.
- Teachers use a range of participative approaches including group work, role play and student presentations. Topical resources such as web-sites and newspapers are utilised well and students appreciate the flexibility within lessons to reflect on current issues and events. Teaching assistants are deployed well to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; helping them to understand concepts and prepare presentations.
- Teachers make effective use of interactive whiteboard technology in the classroom and in Year 7 students have laptops to research topics. However, access to information and communication technology (ICT) for students in Years 8 to 11 is more limited.
- Teachers deal very well with some sensitive and controversial issues. Racism is covered in considerable depth and students understand well the concepts of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. The inter-generational work of the Heritage Centre is much enhanced by students' understanding of the impact of ageism and they are aware of issues affecting women in society. However, areas of discrimination such as mental health and disability are rarely covered, and teachers

are less confident discussing homophobia; some Year 11 students reported that they had never been given the opportunity to discuss this.

- The day to day assessment of students' work in citizenship is often through peer and self evaluation. Whilst this is valuable, students would benefit from more frequent and detailed marking of their work with comments about how to improve further.
- The learning arising from students' engagement in active citizenship is assessed where it is linked to the taught curriculum. For activities beyond the taught curriculum such as projects, trips and residential, an 'Experience Tracking Database' is used to monitor students' engagement. However, the data is yet to be analysed to ascertain which groups or individuals are accessing the provision and which are not.
- Although teachers sometimes refer to students' previous learning in primary school, baseline assessments of students' knowledge and understanding in citizenship do not yet inform planning for Year 7.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The overall pattern of provision is very strong. The thematic approach to the curriculum in both key stages very successfully develops students' skills, knowledge and understanding.
- There is a core citizenship programme at Key Stage 3 and all students study the short course GCSE. All aspects of the core curriculum are well covered. Teachers of other subjects, particularly English, religious education, science and the media are very aware of how they too can support learning in citizenship. A good example of this is the media and art department's production of DVDs about the school's international links with South Africa and the work of the Heritage Centre.
- Off-timetable activities such as the whole school enterprise day are used to further enhance students' research and enquiry skills in the context of citizenship through developing their global and cultural awareness.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- The school has a clear vision for citizenship. This is represented in a range of school policy documents including improvement planning and in the wider ethos of the school.
- The school has provided very good resources for citizenship. There is a strong team of specialist teachers, generous curriculum time and access to further training. The school has rightly identified the need to improve ICT facilities and the range of citizenship related texts in the school library.
- Subject leadership is very good. Subject planning is highly detailed as are schemes of work and individual lesson guidance. The school has responded very well to the changes and opportunities of the revised

curriculum. Schemes of work underpin progression in citizenship by revisiting topics in greater depth across the key stages.

- The school's self evaluation is judicious and accurate. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in citizenship is thorough and embedded. Professional development needs are identified and addressed in faculty meeting time leading to a strong capacity to improve further.

Subject issue: the development of students' political understanding

Political understanding is well provided for in the curriculum and teachers have the confidence and expertise to teach it well. Through their Learning for Life and GCSE studies most students have very good understanding of democracy, the fundamental difference between political views, the role of the local councillor, MP and MEP, and the policy differences of political parties. Students discuss current local, national and global political issues very well, and are encouraged to do so in a range of lessons.

Students in the sixth form who are not studying social science based subjects are less politically aware than those studying the GCSE in Citizenship Studies.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure the student councils mirror democratic processes
- to improve students' access to ICT
- to increase expectations and challenge in lessons
- to improve citizenship enrichment opportunities in the sixth form.

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

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector