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Ms C James
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Dear Ms James

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 9 and 10 November 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of nine lessons; and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good with outstanding features.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good with outstanding features.

- In 2009, students achieved well in the GCSE short course in citizenship. Students' understanding of human rights and responsibilities and the law relating to juveniles is good and those who study GCSE history have good political awareness. Most students have a basic understanding of democratic principles, although their understanding of the range of political parties, the workings of parliament, the criminal justice system, local government and the significance of the media, is limited.

- Through the work of the Language College, students have developed outstanding cultural awareness. They also have a good knowledge of Britain's diversity, although this lacks a political perspective.
- Students are given numerous opportunities to develop their outstanding skills of enquiry, communication, advocacy and representation. Students of all abilities are encouraged to initiate and lead citizenship projects within and beyond the school. The student council is democratically elected, independent of teaching staff, has a representative at governor sub-committee meetings and plays a role in staff appointments.
- Students demonstrate outstanding skills of participation and responsible action in citizenship. The excellent student mentor scheme accepts applications from students of all abilities. Their duties include: hosting open evenings, assisting with Year 6 transition activities, paired reading and the individual mentoring of younger and vulnerable students.
- Girls achieve better than boys at GCSE and more girls take advantage of citizenship opportunities. However, because of the targeting of boys in Year 7, the gap is closing. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities access the same programme as their peers and work is differentiated to meet their needs. Consequently, they achieve well.

Quality of teaching of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning in citizenship is good overall and some is outstanding.

- Teachers demonstrate expert knowledge in citizenship. They use a wide range of approaches, topical resources and technology to involve students in learning actively about citizenship.
- Students enjoy lessons because they are given many opportunities for independent learning. Teachers demonstrate skill and enthusiasm and make lessons relevant to students' lives. Interactive Whiteboard technology is used with flair and creativity. For example, in a lesson on animal rights, technology was used to very good effect to display controversial images that provoked lively debate.
- Teachers understand well how to deal with sensitive issues such as racism, refugees and asylum seekers. Students are encouraged to voice their opinions and do so with intelligence and confidence, while respecting the rights of others to think differently.
- Through the good use of questioning and the regular marking of books and assessed pieces of work, teachers are well aware of how well students are progressing.
- Outside visitors contribute well to the overall quality of teaching. Students appreciate the 'Prison Me, No Way' event and the many international and other visitors enable them learn about other cultures.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the citizenship curriculum is good.

- There is a core programme which covers most aspects of the national curriculum programme of study, although not all and not necessarily at both key stages. The programme is supplemented well by assemblies, relevant school and out-of-school activities such as the Mock Trial competition, the Peacemaker conference and International Day.
- Political, legal and human rights are covered well in Key Stage 3, including pressure groups and active campaigning. Parliamentary democracy and the passing of a bill are covered at both key stages. The areas which are light touch, particularly at Key Stage 3, are the roles of the European Union, United Nations and Commonwealth, the economy and the allocation of public finances and the significance of the media. The programme confuses some aspects of Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education, careers and enterprise, with citizenship.
- At Key Stage 4, religious education makes a very strong contribution with lessons on the environment, crime and punishment, prejudice, discrimination and international development. Geography tackles issues of cultural awareness, fair trade and global economics; science debates energy use and climate change. However, the depth of students' understanding is, to a certain extent, dependent on their options' choices at Key Stage 4.
- The Language College makes an outstanding contribution to the global dimension of the citizenship programme through numerous international links and opportunities for students of all abilities to access overseas trips and learn about other cultures. Good efforts are made to ensure that the curriculum is accessible to all students. Active citizenship opportunities are open to all students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or vulnerabilities are especially encouraged to participate.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- The school has a vision for citizenship as represented in its policy and development planning as an International School and Language College. The subject leader enjoys extensive support from the senior leadership team and the capacity to improve is good.
- Sufficient resources have been allocated in terms of overall curriculum time and materials. The subject leader is responsible for writing schemes of work and lesson plans for the whole teaching team and these are of good quality. In terms of staffing, the school is moving towards a core team of specialist. Eight teachers currently contribute to the core programme but for some citizenship is their second subject. This has consequences for staff training and the monitoring of teaching and learning in citizenship. The subject leader has attended some subject-specific training which is cascaded to other team members. However, this is less than might be accessed by subject leaders and teachers in other disciplines.

- There are opportunities for the teaching team to meet for feedback and cascade training. PSHE is monitored by the Head of Humanities and within this, citizenship teaching may be observed. Improvement planning is informed by work scrutiny and end-of-module evaluations by students and staff. The subject leader has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the department and has produced high-quality action plans.
- The department contributes very well to the school's outstanding community cohesion, particularly through the students' wide ranging participation and responsible action in the community.

Subject issue: students' political understanding

Students' political understanding is good.

- Students demonstrate a basic understanding of democratic principles and can name non-democratic regimes, both historical and contemporary. The student council and form representatives are democratically elected and the school plans to hold a mock general election next year. However, students' knowledge and understanding of the workings of parliament, the funding of public services, the role of local government, the range of political parties and their policy differences are limited.
- Individual students, such as some on the student council and those who study GCSE history, have very good political awareness. Last year's Head Boy represents Sheffield at the UK Youth parliament.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring all have an entitlement to the full national curriculum programme of study at both key stages
- further developing students' political and media literacy
- monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning in citizenship to inform training needs and improvement planning.

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