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Ms J Dibb
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Dear Ms Dibb

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 and 12 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 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and observation of seven lessons or part lessons.

The school does an outstanding job in nurturing citizens in the broadest sense. The overall effectiveness of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject is good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good.

- Standards in citizenship are good, as demonstrated by students' performance in the citizenship studies GCSE.
- Students enjoy citizenship and achieve well, making good contributions to discussion and offering considered views on topical issues.

- Students' knowledge and understanding of issues, such as human rights and UK identity and diversity, are better developed than their political understanding.
- Students involved in the 'learning to lead' programme display outstanding skills in advocacy and taking citizenship action. These and other students also make positive contributions to school and wider communities through the many activities available to them.

Quality of citizenship teaching

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teaching is planned well, with clear objectives and interesting materials.
- Relationships with students are good, contributing to a climate that promotes discussion and the sharing of views.
- Assessment is used well to underpin progress in the examination course. Initiatives have been taken to develop self-assessment in Key Stage 3 but little has been done yet to develop assessment based on National Curriculum levels.
- Good teaching was seen across a range of departments and in the Year 8 skills course, all of which contributed well to students' understanding of citizenship issues and their skills development.

Quality of the citizenship curriculum

The curriculum is good overall.

- Citizenship is provided through specific units within the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme in Years 7, 8 and 11; in the GCSE citizenship studies course in Years 9 and 10; and through cross-curricular links including the Year 8 skills course and contributions from other subjects, including English, mathematics, geography, history, drama and modern languages.
- Although these parts have great merit, they do not yet provide a coherent programme overall that corresponds to the National Curriculum programme of study for Key Stages 3 and 4.
- In particular, there are strengths in aspects such as rights and responsibilities and community cohesion, with work in considerable depth, but a relative weakness in the area of political understanding.
- There is also some imbalance in the emphasis on knowledge and skills required for the examination, including critical thinking and enquiry, with less attention to advocacy, representation and responsible action.
- Notably, the school offers many other opportunities for taking responsible action, not least through the 'learning to lead programme', the school council and the very wide range of extra-curricular activities, with impact from local to global levels.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- The school's vision for citizenship is outstanding, building upon the intentions of citizenship in the National Curriculum. This vision is evident in the school's ethos.
- Subject leadership of citizenship is divided, with separate responsibility for citizenship in the PSHE programme and citizenship studies GCSE. Within these areas of responsibility, leadership is good, with thorough planning and well-resourced units of work.
- However, the division of responsibility for citizenship may explain some discontinuity in the curriculum and the school's early stage of development in addressing the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum. Productive joint planning is evident in the development of the Year 8 skills programme, although the potential of this programme for teaching and assessing citizenship has not been maximised.
- The subject leader and teaching staff have made appropriate links with professional organisations and other sources of help, as well as undertaking a training role linked to an Initial Teacher Education provider.
- The school's self-evaluation in preparation for this inspection was accurate and there is very good capacity to improve.

Subject issue: students' political understanding

Students' political understanding is satisfactory.

- At best, students were able to discuss political systems and processes in some detail and to make comparisons between the UK and other countries.
- More generally, students lacked confidence in talking about these aspects, reflecting the relatively light treatment in the curriculum.
- A five-week unit in the Year 8 PSHE course deals with voting, parties, pressure-groups and the role of MPs. These are revisited in the GCSE course but are treated more lightly than other aspects. There was little evidence of enquiry and debate to deepen political understanding.
- Good features include the election of school councillors, with voting that replicates formal election procedures.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- giving more emphasis to students' political understanding and the development of skills of advocacy and action within the taught citizenship curriculum
- ensuring overall coherence and continuity between Key Stages 3 and 4 when considering how to incorporate new National Curriculum requirements

- developing assessment procedures to provide evidence of students' achievement using the new eight-level scale.

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

Scott Harrison
Additional Inspector