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Dear Mrs Burke

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 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 five lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good.

- Students demonstrate good understanding overall in many key aspects of the subject. This includes democracy and the work of government, human rights and responsibilities, the law and criminal justice system and environmental issues and sustainability. They also demonstrate good understanding of identity and diversity in the UK. Students' knowledge and understanding of the working of local government and the role of local councils are less well-developed.

- Students research topics well and use this information to good effect in pieces of extended writing on citizenship issues. The school's inclusive approach is evident here; students of all abilities are encouraged to research. For example, some interesting work was evident from students' working on Asdan projects.
- Students enjoy opportunities to discuss their views and are respectful in listening to others. They enjoy their learning and value the work on citizenship themes within the school's personal development curriculum (PDC). However, Key Stage 3 students indicated that they would appreciate more feedback on their work in PDC.
- Students of all abilities are encouraged to initiate and involve themselves in citizenship activities within and beyond the school. The student council is democratically elected, well-organised and effective in shaping many aspects of school life. Students are proud of this and can provide many examples of their influence. Their personal development, through participation and responsible action in citizenship activities within and beyond the school, is outstanding. There are many opportunities for students to lead and support others. Responsibilities range from participating on student council committees, to working as prefects, buddies or sports leaders. Further, there are many examples of large numbers of students taking responsible action beyond the school. They are very keen to volunteer and their work in the local community is exemplary, including work with a range of partners, such as older residents, the homeless, local youth groups and support for local and national causes and charities. This makes a strong contribution to social cohesion and is central to the ethos and philosophy of the school which are based on the ARC ('achievement, respect and community') values.

Quality of teaching of citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good.

- Citizenship teaching in PDC was not observed during the visit. However, in other curriculum areas, contributions to citizenship were observed. Here, lesson planning was detailed with objectives for citizenship identified and suitably reinforced with students.
- Relationships are very positive and support a climate where students are encouraged to ask questions and share their views.
- Information and communication technology are used well to stimulate students' thinking and provide good resources for learning.
- A range of subjects contributes well to students' understanding of citizenship issues and enhances their skill development. The contribution from teachers across the curriculum is frequently good but can be variable when opportunities are missed to explore fully the citizenship potential in the learning. Similarly, analysis of students' work in PDC suggests some strengths in teaching but also some inconsistency in approach.

- Assessment is satisfactory and an area for further development. The school has plans to review how feedback is provided and develop the range of assessments required to measure achievements and progress in the subject.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the citizenship curriculum is satisfactory with some good features.

- There is potential in the school's approach to the subject, which includes discrete provision within PDC, contributions from a range of subjects across the curriculum and the inclusion of focus days to enhance learning. However, this needs more rigorous mapping and clear identification of the range and content of learning provided across the wider curriculum to ensure that all students receive their full entitlement and enable progression to be more easily identified.
- The planned content of the discrete provision within PDC is relevant and appropriate.
- Good contributions are made by external visitors and partners on focus days in citizenship to enhance students' learning. Students value these specialist inputs and greatly enjoy these days.
- The curriculum contributions from other subjects are frequently good, but variable at present. At times, the citizenship content is identified and highly relevant, for example in the science and history lessons observed. In other lessons, though the processes used develop good skills, for example, in effective group work, the potential contribution made to the subject content requires further exploration.
- A rich range of extra-curricular activities supports and extends the formal curriculum. This is a strength of provision and enables many students to practise active citizenship.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- You and senior leadership team clearly and convincingly articulate the school's essential values, centred on 'achievement, respect and community'. These are fundamental to the school's ethos and atmosphere and are communicated consistently to students. Consequently, many students appreciate the value of active citizenship and regard this as central to their school lives.
- The subject leader is committed and enthusiastic and has made a sound start in developing discrete provision. He has a good understanding of the areas for development within the subject. Suitable improvement plans are in place, including monitoring and evaluating provision more rigorously, to ensure greater consistency.

- Self-evaluation is accurate at senior- and middle-leadership levels. The school's commitment to ongoing improvement is clear and focused on appropriate priorities with good capacity to realise this.

Subject issue: students' political understanding

Students demonstrate good understanding of the principles of democratic politics and are able to explain the key features. Their understanding of political issues today is well developed. They are beginning to evaluate the role citizens can take in shaping decisions and influencing political systems and can draw sensible conclusions. Many of them can draw on examples of where they have taken action to tackle issues.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- identifying the contributions made to citizenship across the curriculum by clarifying how these fit within the range and content of the subject
- further developing the range and depth of assessment procedures and agreeing how informal feedback will be provided for students
- monitoring and evaluating provision and outcomes more rigorously to ensure greater consistency of approach.

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