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Mr R Crookes
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Dear Mr Crookes

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 December 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 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 and observations of lessons and activities.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good with outstanding features.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement is good.

- Students' knowledge and understanding about citizenship issues are generally good. They enjoy debate, work well in groups and have a positive approach to enquiry and research.
- Many are able to draw on what they have learned in previous lessons as well as on citizenship projects they have carried out. This enables them to grasp concepts well and raises their confidence as effective citizens. A minority are engaged less well.

- The quality of students' written work is good. The best examples demonstrate a depth of understanding and evidence of students having carried out independent study.
- Students achieve well through their involvement in fora such as the school council. The extent to which individuals willingly take responsibility for carrying out various forum tasks is impressive.
- Good student achievement is underpinned by some excellent teacher marking. The marking creates a dialogue and sharing of views and provides students with pointers in terms of exam requirements.
- There is more scope to take account of what students learn through their out-of-school involvement in, for instance, clubs, groups and fundraising in the community.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers are well prepared, lessons conducted in a constructive and relaxed manner and materials well sourced. However, there are weaknesses in the teaching of controversial issues.
- Assessment is well informed and supports learning well. Teachers monitor students' progress on their respective citizenship courses but also take account of their broader knowledge and understanding of citizenship gained across the curriculum.
- Data are used effectively to monitor the progress of all students. Detailed analysis has provided evidence about the performance of both higher and lower attaining students, thereby enabling changes to be made to coursework to accommodate needs.
- The nature of the citizenship projects undertaken by students as part of their coursework is insufficiently demanding and challenging.
- Reports to parents are very good and capture students' progress well across the three areas of learning in citizenship.

Quality of curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the curriculum is good with outstanding features.

- The curriculum is coherent and its overall pattern works well. Attention is given to seeking a balance between the three strands of citizenship and to ensuring students' understanding. Citizenship forms a distinctive, but complementary, element of the personal and social development programme.
- Timely modifications have been made to the curriculum to ensure that the diverse learning needs of students are met. For example, the introduction of an ASDAN course in addition to GCSE.

- Students speak well of the annual citizenship week, including the mock election. The election ensures full student participation, tackles current topics and gives students experience of campaigning.

Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management of the subject are good.

- Good, enthusiastic and self-critical subject leadership is exercised. Links between the citizenship course and cross-curricular activities are managed well.
- Guidance and support provided by the subject leader to citizenship teachers is responsive and suitably flexible.
- Efforts to ensure that the subject is inclusive of all students are paying dividends. The introduction of the ASDAN award is a direct attempt to ensure inclusiveness; teachers are flexible in their classroom practices such that they include all learners well.
- The departmental self-assessment document is comprehensive, well informed and accurate. It provides a good ongoing vehicle for continuous monitoring and improvement and is used to good effect.
- Good policy guidance is in place covering issues such as teaching and learning styles, monitoring and assessment. The document is clear, well written and straightforward.
- The school seeks the views of parents through surveys and good use is made of student focus groups to enable students to express their views.
- Despite good progress having been made, there is insufficient engagement by teachers in continuing professional development.

Subject issue: students' political understanding

Students' political understanding is good.

- The supportive school community encourages students to contribute freely to various aspects of school life. This has a positive impact on their motivation and learning and enables them to practise the skills of being effective citizens. More formally, the curriculum tackles current and topical issues well and most students readily engage in discussion. While keen to argue their case, individuals understand alternative and opposing points of views. There is scope for the school to further develop higher attaining students' political skills and nurture their obvious interests.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing even greater challenge to some students
- improving the teaching of controversial issues
- reviewing the professional development needs of citizenship teachers.

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

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector