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Mr P Craven
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Craven

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 1 and 2 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement is satisfactory.

- Most students enjoy debate and discussion and work comfortably in groups.
- In some instances, students understood the causes and consequences of concepts such as discrimination and prejudice. They showed interest in issues, such as gender stereotyping in GCSE physical education and the application of national taxes in mathematics, and approached the investigation of ethical issues regarding DNA fingerprinting in science with enthusiasm.

- However, overall, students' knowledge of key areas in citizenship is variable. Lower attaining students struggle to relate to issues in the world around them.
- There are good examples of students' peer-assessing each other's work, an approach that develops their sense of critical enquiry in citizenship well.
- Students gain much from their involvement in 'student voice' activities and peer-mentoring and are able to articulate what they learn from such involvement. They gain an understanding of political processes in community-based projects. College participation activities help them understand some of the social, educational and developmental hurdles that some younger students face.
- There is insufficient distinction in achievement between Key Stages 3 and 4.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers prepare lessons well and exercise good class control.
- In the best examples, teachers formulate probing questions and often invite students to express their views about issues as a means of deepening the discussion. They encourage consideration of values, attitudes, labelling and political change in society.
- Lessons draw on accurate and up-to-date resources, including extracts from newspapers and television.
- The facilitation and curriculum management of the broad range of 'student voice' activities are good.
- Delivery of the GCSE course involves a large number of enthusiastic tutors who know the students well. Not all, however, are sufficiently knowledgeable about the key concepts and processes underpinning the citizenship curriculum.
- The quality of marking of work is satisfactory.
- Assessment in relation to students' GCSE coursework is managed well but teachers are less familiar with the recently introduced broader citizenship assessment framework.
- A report is sent to parents on students' predicted GCSE grade and current performance grade. The extent to which more qualitative reporting has evolved is otherwise limited.

Quality of curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The GCSE short course, only in its first year, is bringing greater shape and form to citizenship. Teachers welcome its introduction.

- The curriculum is enriched by 'student voice' activities and an understanding by teachers of the underlying methodologies to engage students in learning of this nature. The range of activities includes cultural ambassadors, peer mentors linked to boys' achievements, engagement in the local and county youth forum, the development of students participating in departmental reviews and the sixth-form student union activity.
- Sixth-form students have good opportunities to participate in citizenship-related activities, the best of which are driven by the students. The 'Leading Edge' citizenship research project is one such example.
- While the GCSE ensures student entitlement to citizenship, the college has yet to fully consider how other aspects of its curriculum, taken together, contribute to a more comprehensive citizenship education offer. Evidence suggests that some subjects incorporate citizenship appropriately but the subject audit falls short of what is required to confirm this. Nonetheless, the college has the potential of being 'citizenship rich.'
- A citizenship element is included within the foundation learning tier.
- Very extensive links with other agencies, partners and charities augment the citizenship programme well. How the quality and impact of these inputs to citizenship learning is assessed is less clear.

Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- The college has made recent and rapid improvement in citizenship.
- Curriculum leadership is good. The subject coordinator has done much in a short time, taken pragmatic and effective decisions and has a good overview of the quality of the teaching and learning. She has been able to provide new and bespoke teaching resources, which are appreciated by staff.
- Self-assessment of the subject at faculty level and within the college overall is not developed sufficiently well.
- Senior managers have given a good lead in relation to 'student voice'; the impact of which has been to encourage ownership of such activities among teachers and young people.
- College-wide strategies in relation to monitoring evaluation, teaching and learning have helped support recent developments in citizenship. The strategy has helped create a constructive climate of improvement.
- Key citizenship staff have insufficient access to citizenship professional development opportunities and learning networks.

Subject issue: students' political understanding

Students' political understanding is satisfactory.

- In some instances, particularly through related subjects, students consider topical political issues and concepts which broaden their understanding. However, the extent to which citizenship course teachers have a coherent and confident grasp of the subject's role in nurturing active and effective citizenship is mixed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a college-wide citizenship policy
- concentrating efforts on engaging lower attaining students meaningfully in citizenship
- improving the opportunities available for professional development of key staff.

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