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Dear Mrs Marshall

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 3 and 4 March 2010 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 students, staff and governors; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observations of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good.

Achievement and enjoyment of learning in citizenship

Achievement and enjoyment of learning in citizenship are good.

- Students engage well in citizenship lessons and most enjoy the subject. They demonstrate good knowledge of the key concepts, such as the role of pressure groups, sustainability, human rights and the work of political parties.
- Many students are able to draw on what they have learned in citizenship lessons and through the school curriculum more generally, enabling them to grasp concepts and relate to citizenship in the wider world.

- Students research in groups in a constructive and cooperative manner. They are particularly good at analysis through the formulation of relevant questions for their peers.
- Those involved in student-voice activities, particularly those who are younger and less experienced, value and gain much from participating. A few spoke knowledgeably about their impending involvement in classroom observations for which external training had prepared them well.
- Whole-school elections help students to learn about and practise democracy and representation.
- Students are generally clear about citizenship as a concept but too few understand what they are gaining from the school's citizenship education programme. For example, many do not see a link between their involvement in community and charitable activities and the development of their active citizenship skills.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good.

- The quality of the teaching is pivotal to students' achievement, engagement and enjoyment. In the best examples, lessons are constructed well and teachers promote key words and concepts to reinforce learning. Asking for students' views on current issues evokes good individual responses and often sparks lively debate. Teachers remind students that differing views have equal validity.
- Experienced teachers handle mixed-ability groups well. They have the confidence to draw on students' experiences and opinions as a key learning resource. This practice contrasts with that shown by less experienced colleagues who necessarily rely more heavily on curriculum materials.
- In the weaker teaching, explanations are insufficiently clear leaving students uncertain about the purpose of the exercises expected of them. Less-experienced teachers do not sufficiently draw on the 'active and critical citizen' element of citizenship education or link lessons directly with current affairs.
- Assessment in citizenship is underdeveloped.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the citizenship curriculum is satisfactory.

- Over the last few years, managers have provided additional curriculum time for the subject.
- While there are strengths in the cross-curricular model for citizenship, it is not understood sufficiently well by all of the teachers who have a role in delivering it.
- A helpful departmental handbook and schemes of work provide a good and readily accessible set of resources for the non-specialist teacher.

- Plans to concentrate citizenship subject expertise within the humanities department appear well conceived.
- 'Citizenship, enrichment and the world of work' feature highly in the recently opened partnership sixth form and are woven well into the formal and informal curriculum. Sixth-form students play a lead role on their academic and social committees. They show initiative in pursuing wider issues which they feel need attention. Sixth-form students' engagement in mentoring younger students helps to create a healthy ethos of cooperation.
- Staff at the specialist speech and language centre work closely with the citizenship coordinator to enable all pupils to access their curriculum entitlement.
- A recent review of student-voice activities, leading to a broader variety of forums, has helped to engage more students and in more interesting ways.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

Leadership and management in citizenship are good.

- Leaders and managers have created a strong citizenship ethos within the school and are eager that it continues to play a key part in the local community.
- A need to improve citizenship provision had been noted by the senior leadership team and actions have been taken accordingly.
- Curriculum leadership is very good. A knowledgeable advanced skills teacher also acts as part-time citizenship coordinator. She brings a depth of knowledge, understands its complementary relationship with other subjects and supports teachers well through her responsive leadership. Her well-developed professional networks benefit the school.
- Given the scope of the work, the complexity of the cross-curricular model and the evident need to tackle key areas such as quality assurance and staff development, the time allocation for this work is insufficient.
- Exemplary and well-informed governor involvement in citizenship provides subject leaders and managers with a good balance of support and challenge.
- Unlike other curriculum areas, citizenship does not benefit from a dedicated resource area.

Subject issue: the development of students' political understanding.

Students' political understanding is good.

- Most students display some interest in political matters and have an underpinning knowledge of how party politics operate. Those who are most engaged have developed a sharp and critical interest in current affairs. Those involved in student-voice activities recognise their

responsibility to represent the student body as a whole. Activities of this nature usefully mirror democratic processes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include

- developing a better shared understanding of the citizenship programme of study
- supporting further professional development
- reviewing the citizenship coordinator's role.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship in the school.

As I explained previously, 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