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Mr C Roberts
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Roberts

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 19 and 20 April 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 staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is outstanding.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement and enjoyment in citizenship are outstanding.

- Standards are above average in Key Stage 3 and well above average in Key Stage 4. All students take the short course GCSE examination and results have risen steadily over the last three years. In 2009, 81% of students achieved an A* to C grade compared with 57% nationally. The proportion of students achieving an A or A* grade is double the national average. Achievement in citizenship is excellent across the school.
- Students have a good knowledge of all aspects of the curriculum and both their oral and written work are good. Students are interested and curious

about the world. They enjoy their work and believe it equips them with crucial knowledge and skills for their future lives.

- Students in both key stages develop effective research skills and use information and communication technology (ICT) well.
- Students relish the opportunity to engage in discussion and debate. Many older students are confident and articulate speakers and present their points of view in a sophisticated and mature manner. They are able to look at all sides of questions to reach balanced and well-justified viewpoints.
- Participation in active citizenship is excellent. Students make an outstanding contribution to their school, local and wider communities. Notable examples include Connecting Classrooms, a project linking Smithills to four schools in Pakistan, working as sports leaders in primary schools and participating in the Building Schools for the Future design project.
- The school's performing arts specialism provides numerous opportunities for students to perform in over 50 concerts in the local community and beyond. Some act as tutors for Saturday community music-making, the family of primary schools and a local special school, and take part in North-West Asian Arts.
- Charity work includes supporting Bolton Hospice, Fair Trade, the Eleven Million project and many others. Students raised over £20,000 for charity last year.
- The school council is vigorous and active, ensuring that the student voice is heard. Students know that their opinions matter. The school council has a high profile in the school with impressive results. Members of the council regularly meet you, lead assemblies, raise funds for charity events and organise student surveys on issues such as uniform, the new House system and the move to vertical grouping; they also organise canvassing for the youth parliament and assist in Learning Walks and the appointment of new staff.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is good, with outstanding teaching in Years 10 and 11.

- Teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and outstanding in Key Stage 4. Planning is excellent; lessons ensure that all students can participate at their own level and make good progress. Many teachers have expert subject knowledge and use a variety of exciting materials and teaching strategies to engage, enthuse and inspire students.
- The Essential Skills curriculum in Years 7 and 8 places a good focus on citizenship in its cross-curricular teaching of history, geography and religious education as well as in discrete work each week on citizenship. The approach enables students to develop important transferable skills, including those necessary for active citizenship.

- Lessons are brisk, challenging and matched well to students' differing needs. The balance between teacher-led activities, discussion, analysis and feedback is good.
- Assessments are regular and highly effective with students receiving good-quality feedback and advice on their work. They also engage in self- and peer-assessment. All students are aware of the levels at which they are working. Parents are well informed about the progress their children are making through high-quality reports.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the citizenship curriculum is outstanding.

- All students study citizenship as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 11. In addition, other subjects make a significant contribution to the citizenship curriculum; notable examples are art, design and technology, history, religious education and ICT. The new head of subject is developing a system of support for all other departments to ensure they further embed citizenship aims into their planning. Information is up to date and the curriculum is flexible in response to news events.
- The school is adept at developing excellent cross-curricular sessions. For example, in a recent local history day, the design, food technology, history and citizenship departments organised an event in which local senior citizens shared their experiences and memories of life during the Second World War while students cooked meals typical of the time of rationing.
- The specialism in performing arts has outstanding impact in bringing creativity to all aspects of the curriculum. The emphasis on developing effective communication skills ensures that students are articulate and confident. The opportunity to perform for a wide variety of audiences locally and internationally allows students to work with diverse groups.
- The school is working towards the cultural diversity award and promoting understanding of different cultures through various initiatives. These include 'Connecting Classrooms' which is soon to be extended to working with schools in Africa, and LENS, a project designed to promote a global dimension throughout the curriculum.
- The curriculum is enriched by numerous visits, such as the Year 8 trip to the Houses of Parliament, visits to the local magistrates' court and mock trials at the Crown court. These bring the subject alive for many students.
- An excellent range of conferences further enhances provision for every year group. Year 7 students recently held a conference 'Alien nation', part of which was to consider an inter-galactic parliament and to look at concepts of fairness in society.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are outstanding.

- Citizenship is embraced by senior leaders and is firmly embedded in the whole-school ethos. Leaders and managers at all levels share the same

vision of students being empowered as informed and confident citizens. Senior leaders ensure the subject is well resourced and taught by experts.

- The department has inspiring leadership totally committed to strengthening its work still further. Capacity to improve is excellent because of accurate self-evaluation, drive, and ambition. The department has clear aims for improvement, knows what it wants to achieve and how to achieve it. Current action plans are appropriate and well-considered. Leaders are creative and innovative in their approach to teaching and learning.
- A good range of additional activities is provided for gifted and talented students and other pupils with a keen interest in the subject. The 'stars in your eyes' course is a useful strategy to help students secure A* grades.
- All aspects of citizenship are monitored very effectively. A comprehensive programme of additional training and support is available for all teachers, including those teaching Essential Skills and citizenship.

Subject issue: the development of student's political understanding

The extent of students' political understanding is excellent.

- The Essential Skills curriculum has been adapted effectively to include a specific unit on the current general election. Consequently, many students are able to demonstrate clear understanding of the issues involved, the differences between the main parties, the distinctive features of positive and negative campaigning and the impact of the media.
- Curriculum coverage is comprehensive. Good teaching and students' positive attitudes to their work result in excellent understanding of many aspects of the British political system. Students show considerable understanding of major issues such as crime, health, national identity and education and are able to identify differences in the approaches of the three main political parties towards these issues.
- Students have practical engagement in the democratic process through the school council, form representatives, pupils' voice conferences and participation in the Bolton Youth Parliament elections.
- The school supports the development of students' political understanding through numerous trips and visits. These include visits to the Houses of Parliament, Bolton Town Hall and Lord Mayor's parlour and a mock trial at the crown courts.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- supporting and enhancing provision for citizenship in the Essential Skills curriculum in Years 7 and 8.

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 under the unique

reference number for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw
Additional Inspector