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Mr R Milligan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Milligan

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 22 and 23 June 2010 to look at work in citizenship.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, a visit to the post-16 unit and observations of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is outstanding.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement and enjoyment of learning in citizenship are outstanding.

- Pupils are enthusiastic learners who thoroughly enjoy their life at school. They work well with staff to develop a sense of community.
- There is evidence of pupils taking often small but distinct steps in their learning over time. In most cases, they gain the foundations of communication, an awareness of others and the ability to make choices and express a preference. In broad citizenship terms, they learn to interact and engage with the world around them.
- The gifted and talented group responds very well to challenge and shows an active interest in discussing topical issues, such as national attitudes towards the football World Cup competition and the Gulf of Mexico oil incident.

- Upper school and post-16 pupils grasp the very good opportunities provided to learn about and contribute to the community. Their personal development, vocational skills and confidence are enhanced through well-planned work experience and attending college courses.
- The experience of school elections and selection of 'peer champions' help pupils to learn about empathy and compromise.

Quality of teaching in citizenship

The quality of teaching in citizenship is outstanding.

- Teachers have highly developed expertise, are inclusive and reinforce rules in a gentle but clear manner. They are flexible and, in the best instances, spontaneous in responding to pupils' contributions in lessons; they note and celebrate progress and are sensitive to the need to provide personal space for pupils.
- Within higher attaining and functioning groups, teaching is paced appropriately and employs a good mix of tasks, including speaking and listening, individual and team work, harnessing information technology and using literacy and numeracy.
- Progression is clearly delineated from early years onwards, the impact of which is to allow the pupils to grow and develop in what could otherwise be a very sheltered environment.
- Assessment is detailed and applied to good effect. The use of pupils' profiles enables a clear focus on individual needs and progress.
- A strong team approach is evident in lessons and activities, with teachers and teaching assistants working well together.
- 'Student voice' activities, including the school council, are well constructed to enable pupils to gain as much learning as possible.

Quality of the curriculum in citizenship

The quality of the citizenship curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum has a strong personal, social, health and citizenship education focus and continues to evolve. It is constructed around the needs of the child and fine-tuned in the light of experience. The nature and quality of the teaching support this highly personalised curriculum.
- Accreditation is used to good effect and learning is monitored well.
- The post-16 curriculum is premised on individual choice and on acquiring and practising skills for life. It enables the young adults to participate in the local community and supports their transition to adult life well.
- Specific citizenship aspects of the curriculum are tackled through issues which are immediate and to which pupils can relate. For instance, pollution features smoking, litter and fouling by dogs. For the more able, the curriculum tackles topical issues, including the recent general election.

- Technology is used very effectively to enhance learning and enable pupils to record their progress over time. Sensory experiences enrich pupils' participation in, for example, Red Nose day, the 'chatterbox challenge', and hugely enjoyable simulated journeys to other countries.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are outstanding.

- Managers have a clear vision of the contribution education makes to the quality of pupils' lives. This inclusive attitude spreads across the school. Managers recognise staff skills and expertise which enables them to influence teaching and learning.
- Citizenship issues can be seen across many aspects of the school's work, especially in relation to advocacy and community engagement. Scope may exist for a further sharpening of the curriculum, particularly in relation to the more able, in line with the citizenship key concepts and processes found within the national curriculum.
- Senior managers' high levels of experience in accreditation, assessment and curriculum development have supported citizenship education well.
- Specialist school status has helped to consolidate existing aspects of the school's work and enabled it to develop an outreach function to support other schools and initiatives.
- Continuing professional development is responsive and sessions are well attended by staff.

The area for improvement, which we discussed, includes:

- considering the extent to which reference to the National Curriculum guidance can further strengthen citizenship education.

I hope that 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 published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector