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Mr P Allen
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Dear Mr Allen

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 and 18 March 2008 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 provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils'/students' work, observation of assemblies and tutor times and observation of ten lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good with some very good features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students display an interest in the local and wider world. Most students are attentive and fully engaged in learning. They understand the need to research further and evaluate what they have learned.
- Students have a good knowledge of legal and human rights, the work of the voluntary sector, the impact of the media and environmental

issues. Their understanding of the tax system and the work of Parliament is developing.

- Written work is generally of a good standard. Lower attaining students are well supported in small groups and with teaching assistants in lessons.
- Students are developing good skills in enquiry and research. Their work using information and communication technology is good.
- Lessons encourage discussion and debate, although some students are hampered by their lack of confidence in speaking in public.
- Students regularly engage in useful community activities by becoming Millennium volunteers, sports leaders and peer mentors. A notable example is the exchange link the school has with a South African school. Students are inspired by this contact and speak about how much it has widened their horizons. Students have also worked on a project in Ghana, led and organised by the local youth service through Raleigh International.
- The student council and sixth form executive are well developed and give all students a voice in school and many opportunities to take responsibility.
- Sixth formers provide leadership in many activities and promote the positive ethos of the school.

Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are generally well-prepared and move at a good pace.
- Good teaching ensures that students understand specialist vocabulary, provides a balance between listening, speaking and doing and promotes independent learning through individual research, discussion and debate.
- Teachers deal with sensitive and controversial issues well.
- ICT is used very effectively to promote students skills of independent research and enquiry.
- Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good it is because sometimes the teacher does most of the talking with fewer opportunities for the students to participate.
- Some topics do not provide opportunities for more able students to be suitably stimulated and challenged.
- Teachers respond to topical issues well.
- Assessment is good. Students know how well they are doing and their work is marked regularly with suitable feedback on how to improve.
- Reporting requirements are met. Parents are informed about the course content and how well the students have performed in key subject areas.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- There are good links with feeder middle schools to ensure that the course is covered effectively for Key stage 3.

- There is a whole-school approach with the core curriculum being delivered through citizenship units in discrete personal, social and health education lessons and the short GCSE religious studies course. Other aspects are delivered through subjects such as history, geography and science.
- Recently the school has decided to enter all students in Year 11 for 'Preparation for Working life' accreditation, equivalent to a half GCSE certificate. This means that some citizenship units have been condensed and there are a few gaps in knowledge at Key Stage 4. Managers are aware of this and intending to compensate by curriculum changes in Years 10. The school is making a laudable attempt to provide as much preparation for future life, including the world of work, as possible, within a limited time span.
- All staff play their part in delivering citizenship units and understand the value of the course. The school is developing a specialist team of teachers who deliver the core citizenship curriculum.
- The curriculum is enhanced by inviting speakers into school to share their experience and expertise.
- A very effective partnership between school staff and the youth services based in school ensures that opportunities and support for students are maximised.
- The school encourages students to contribute to their school, local and wider communities. A group of students is currently lobbying the local council about amenities in the area and more than 50 students are participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Engineering students have links with a specialist engineering school in France.

Leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- Senior managers fully support the cross-curricular delivery of the subject and the promotion of citizenship aims and values.
- There is enthusiasm and commitment on the part of managers and staff generally to develop and promote citizenship by providing funding, training and developing staff expertise.
- The subject co-ordinator monitors teaching, learning and assessment in PSHE and citizenship. Tracking procedures enable the school to identify stronger and weaker areas.
- The school is seeking to refine and improve provision and there is good capacity for improvement.

Subject issue: teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- Provision for teaching and learning about the diversity of the United Kingdom is satisfactory. There is no planned programme as such, but students have a good understanding of the different major faiths practised in Britain from their work in religious education. The history and geography departments build citizenship aims and objectives into most lessons plans and thus play a major part in educating students about population issues, migration and its impact on the British economy.

Inclusion

- There is very effective support for students who need extra help. Some aspects of provision do not provide enough challenge for more able students. The school has open access to the sixth form and provides courses in which lower attaining students can be successful.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure that all citizenship lessons provide sufficient challenge for higher attaining students
- to explore every opportunity to increase the confidence of students in contributing to discussions and debate.

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

Judith Straw
Additional Inspector