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7 December 2009

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Dear Dr Stone

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 26 November 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 particular focus on 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 observation of part of three citizenship lessons, other lessons linked to citizenship, and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship is good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good overall.

- During the last two years, GCSE citizenship grades improved strongly, with 67% of the cohort gaining grade C or above in 2009. Unvalidated teacher assessments in Key Stage 3 showed parity with other foundation subjects.
- Students interviewed showed good knowledge and understanding of aspects of citizenship although, particularly in Year 11, the area of democracy and parliamentary government were weaker than other aspects.

- Relatively little written work was seen, reflecting the emphasis in lessons on discussion and debate. Students expressed their interest in and enjoyment of this aspect of citizenship including work on topical issues.
- Students studying AS-level politics made good progress in developing their understanding of the role of different types of pressure groups in UK democracy.

Quality of citizenship teaching

The quality of the citizenship teaching observed was good.

- Three citizenship part-lessons were observed, taught by non-specialists in their role as form tutors. The lessons were well-prepared and engaging, involving students in consideration of topical issues through group work and whole-class discussion.
- The school's self-evaluation highlights some inconsistency in teaching as an issue to be tackled. Interviews with students also revealed some inconsistency in teaching and assessment.
- In lessons observed for links to citizenship, the teaching varied in quality.
- A good sixth-form AS lesson was characterised by the high level of challenge and the involvement of students in purposeful group work.
- The school has developed an approach to end-of-unit assessment of citizenship based on tests and teacher assessment, using the new eight-level scale. In one lesson, reference was made to levels to demonstrate how to make good progress. Although more needs to be done to make the assessments valid and reliable, this represents a good start.

Quality of the citizenship curriculum

The quality of the citizenship curriculum is good overall.

- There is a good core programme, supported well by schemes of work and resources.
- The coverage of citizenship content and concepts is stronger than of processes of advocacy, representation and action, although there are some good examples of these.
- The curriculum is supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities that involves students in citizenship from local to global levels. These include the assembly programme, peer mentoring, the school council, charitable work, and a collaborative local project for students to improve the area. The school has also received an award for international links.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- The school has recognised the importance of citizenship and established it well in the curriculum and the life of the school.
- The subject leader provides good support for the large team of teachers; schemes of work, resources and common assessments promote the taught programme. However, his unavailability for monitoring means that he has no direct influence on the quality of teaching.
- A thorough audit has been undertaken to raise the profile of citizenship with other departments.
- The school has sought other ways to tackle this problem, including the use of a carousel to enable teachers to specialise.

Subject issue: pupils' political understanding

Students' political understanding is satisfactory.

- Year 9 students demonstrated strengths in knowledge and understanding of aspects of democracy and parliamentary government, including the work of political parties and pressure groups.
- Year 11 students were less secure in these key areas.
- Students' work and subject documentation suggested that, while there is adequate provision to develop students' political understanding, more emphasis might be placed on this area.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- taking forward plans to increase the expertise of teachers of citizenship
- developing schemes of work to take account of the revised National Curriculum, ensuring a balanced programme overall with sufficient emphasis on advocacy, representation and action
- refining the assessment system to improve validity and reliability.

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

Scott Harrison
Additional Inspector