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Mr N Anderson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Anderson

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 October 2008 to look at work in citizenship.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of citizenship, the visit had a particular focus on assessment.

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 students' work and observation of nine lessons, a peer mentoring session and a school council meeting.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- At the end of Year 11 all students have been entered for the short course GCSE examination for the last four years. Results are consistently in line with, or just above, the national average and students achieve well.
- Students have a very good understanding of the key factual content of citizenship, particularly legal and human rights, the concepts of identity and community, the diversity of the population of the United Kingdom and the criminal justice system. A Year 9 student with whom I spoke

offered a definition of what makes a good citizen that could hardly be bettered.

- Students develop good debating skills and work well collaboratively. They engage in many discussions and debates, although girls are sometimes more hesitant than boys in expressing their views.
- Students use ICT very effectively and speak enthusiastically about the benefits the school's recently acquired specialist status in maths and computing have brought to their work in citizenship.
- All students are involved in some form of active citizenship. Projects are organised at the end of Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11 as part of the GCSE coursework requirement. Students have helped numerous charities and local groups in the community.
- The democratically elected school council is an effective voice for students to express their views on school issues. They are proud of their school and its place in the community.
- Older students train as peer mentors and run drop-in sessions at lunch time for Year 7 students. They organise activities and listen to any worries younger students might have.
- Students are consulted on all aspects of school development and play an active role. They participate in the appointment of new staff and some are currently working on a consultation for the Building Schools for the Future initiative.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding aspects.

- Planning is excellent. Citizenship lessons are consistently interesting, provide a good range of different activities and use stimulating resources, including expert use of the interactive white boards in every classroom.
- Information is as up-to-date as possible and linked to local and national events. Students are taught to distinguish between opinion and fact.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive support in citizenship lessons to enable them to take a full and active part.
- Relationships are excellent. Students say that they enjoy citizenship lessons and feel the topics they cover will be of value to them in the future.
- Students learn important skills through their work in citizenship which will be of value throughout their future education and working lives.
- Teachers give students early experience of tackling examination questions so that they are thoroughly prepared for the GCSE examination.
- Lessons provide plenty of opportunity for students to work in groups, discuss their ideas and learn how to express them to best advantage.
- Students are set challenging targets for citizenship in both key stages. Their work is marked helpfully so that they know how to improve and reach their targets.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- All students study citizenship in Years 7-9 in a series of substantial units within PSHE; in Years 10 and 11 citizenship is taught as a discrete subject.
- Other subjects across the curriculum make a significant contribution to students' knowledge and understanding in citizenship, notably religious education.
- The impact of specialist status as a maths and computing college has brought benefits to citizenship through providing more involvement with the community, developing increased ICT skills and enhancing provision to prepare students for their future economic well-being and financial capability. A learning portal is currently being established which enables parents, students and staff to access information and share ideas and comments.
- Stimulating discussions and debates as well as research projects give students important skills that are transferable to other subjects and their future education.
- Visits and a wide range of outside speakers bring the subject alive for students. For example, during the survey visit students in Year 10 gave their full attention to a talk from the community police about the hazards of illegal off-road vehicles.
- Numerous opportunities exist for students to take part in active citizenship and to be assessed on the contributions they make.
- By the time they leave the school all students have planned and implemented a substantial community project.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are outstanding.

- Your long standing conviction that citizenship is an essential subject for all students has been the driving force behind its development and success.
- The citizenship co-ordinator leads the subject very well. She offers excellent support to teachers individually and collectively. The citizenship handbook, subtitled 'From the National Curriculum to our curriculum' is a model of good practice. The school has good citizenship expertise among the staff.
- Training for the subject is good. Teachers embrace all opportunities to develop their expertise by attending national and local courses.
- The subject leader and other senior managers monitor the quality of teaching and learning well and provide creative opportunities for staff development.
- The subject is well funded.
- Parents receive detailed reports which explain the course content, comment on progress and give targets for future achievement.
- There is good capacity for further improvement because self evaluation is strong. The citizenship development plan identifies exciting opportunities to enhance provision further. For example, the recent

'Democracy Day' for Year 7 was the first in a planned programme of off-timetable days designed to promote active citizenship even further.

Subject issue: assessment

- Students' work is marked regularly and comments are included to help them to improve.
- Key Stage 3 students take key assessments twice per year. The school is currently developing 'levelled assessments' using the new eight point scale.
- Key Stage 4 students undertake a termly assessment in addition to examinations at the end of Year 10 and a mock GCSE examination in Year 11.
- The school has tracking data showing the rate of progress across the school over several years.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to use the developing on-line learning community to encourage the engagement of all students, and especially girls, in discussion of citizenship issues.

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