



Citizenship in secondary schools: evidence from Ofsted inspections (2003/04)

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Standards in GCSE citizenship studies

In the GCSE, 51.4% of pupils gained A*–C grades and 94.6% gained A*–G grades. The total entry rose significantly this year to 27,184.

Overview

Increasingly, schools are taking National Curriculum citizenship seriously and establishing comprehensive programmes. As yet, however, pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching compare unfavourably with established subjects and there is little that is graded very good. In one in four schools, provision is unsatisfactory. Sometimes this is because the school made a very late start in introducing citizenship; in others, key management decisions were based on misunderstanding or scepticism. There are growing numbers of expert teachers, and most teaching is satisfactory, but citizenship is generally less well taught where tutors are involved. Assessment is the aspect of teaching that teachers feel least confident about, and in half of the schools pupils do not know what they need to do to make progress. Involvement in GCSE citizenship short courses has been generally associated with greater focus, better teaching and higher standards and achievement.

Strengths in secondary citizenship

Schools that have developed effective practice in National Curriculum citizenship demonstrate some or all of the following characteristics.

- School managers understand and support the introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject.
- Pupils' achievement is improving as the school gains experience of what works well in the subject and how to assess it.
- There is a strong and identifiable core programme, irrespective of how it is delivered.
- Pupils' attitudes to citizenship are good, and they understand in what ways they are making progress.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are up to date with subject thinking.
- Resources are used critically, with an emphasis on providing a good level of challenge.
- Citizenship involves homework.
- Some or all pupils are following accredited courses, including the short course GCSE.

Areas for development in secondary citizenship

Strengthening the position of citizenship in the curriculum

In 2003/04, in one school in seven provision for citizenship was judged to be very good, and in a further one school in four it was judged to be good. This is a cause for celebration, and increasingly there are good examples of citizenship provision to show what is possible. However, in one in four schools provision was judged to be unsatisfactory. For some of these schools, the judgement of 'unsatisfactory' came as a surprise because key staff took the view that the school was developing 'good citizens' in the broadest sense. This is not the issue. The National Curriculum provides a programme of study for citizenship. This is additional to any general provision that supports pupils' development as young citizens, whether in the ethos of the school or the implicit contribution made by other subjects. Ofsted has taken a firm line on this since it first published on schools' preparation for citizenship in 2001, and in its guidance to inspectors.

Although it is not for Ofsted to say how National Curriculum citizenship should be incorporated into the curriculum, there is good evidence to suggest what is working, and what is not. A minority of schools have established a discrete core programme taught by a small group of specialists, the latter including recruits drawn from the new citizenship PGCE courses. More frequently, citizenship is a significant partner with PSHE or other subjects, usually being taught in distinctive modules. This core is augmented, for example, by participation and responsible action on activity days and through the work of a democratic school council. Such approaches work well because citizenship has sufficient time, an identity to which pupils can relate, and building blocks which together establish coherence and progression.

Where citizenship provision has been judged unsatisfactory, the subject is insubstantial or invisible. Usually this is where:

- citizenship is provided entirely through other subjects, but not distinctively
- tutorial periods are used, but without the necessary time or expertise to support effective subject development
- the curriculum consists of 'opportunities' for some pupils for enrichment rather than an entitlement for all.

Between these extremes are courses which, at this stage of development, have been judged satisfactory by inspectors but where key areas such as assessment are not yet in place. Inspectors were instructed to regard citizenship as an emerging subject, and to make allowances. Consequently, some of the courses that are judged to have been satisfactory at this stage are based on curriculum models that may not be viable in the longer term, as suggested above. The inspectors, too, learn as they go. Some have said to schools that all subjects should identify their contribution to citizenship. This is not consistent with other advice that citizenship should be identifiable and coherent. Far more constructive for schools that choose the cross-

subject route is to go with strength, identifying those subjects with the greatest capacity to provide good citizenship units, and to leave the others to pursue their own priorities. The latest advice to inspectors can be found on the Ofsted website¹.

The most-asked question about citizenship in the curriculum is where the time should come from. Admittedly, the curriculum is a crowded place, but schools have always had to adapt to changing requirements, and this is a major change. Some schools have responded radically: by lengthening the school day; by cutting down on tutor time and creating a new curriculum slot; or by planned periodic times when the timetable is suspended. Most have tried to incorporate citizenship without changing the timetable, usually by assuming that PSHE can take up most of the programme. Whether PSHE is used, or other subjects, senior managers should appreciate the time demands of citizenship, and if the overall time available can not be increased, time for the new subject should be found equitably. This should be a priority for some schools when they approach a curriculum review.

Raising expectations for pupils' achievement in citizenship

Pupils in many schools talk with confidence about their achievement in aspects of citizenship. It remains a problem that in many schools their experience is limited to parts of the programme, and their concept of the subject sometimes reflects misunderstandings on the part of the school (for example, that sex education is part of National Curriculum citizenship).

In some schools, pupils produce very little written work in citizenship, and some files contain work that is low level, including much completion of worksheets. This work is too often well below the pupils' achievement in other subjects, and higher attainers tend to be the group least well served by these activities. The subject has a written requirement and pupils should have opportunities for enquiry and communication that allow them to pursue topics in depth. Similarly, reflections on participation can produce very good work.

Additionally, from 2003, there is a requirement to assess pupils' progress and report on their achievement at the end of Year 9. A minority of schools have made a good start at this, using assessed tasks and pupils' own assessment of their work to underpin progress. For many schools, however, assessment is as yet at an early stage so that they are not in a position to meet the requirement.

In many of those schools that have adopted the short course GCSE in Citizenship Studies, both pupils' achievement and standards are higher – whether compared to those of previous cohorts, with work in Key Stage 3, or with their peers not studying the GCSE. Several schools that had identified low standards in citizenship as a problem have used GCSE as a lever for improvement. In particular, some schools

¹ *Update 43*, which can be found in the inspectors section of the Ofsted website, spells out both the minimum requirement and Ofsted's approach to the difficult area of participation and responsible action.

have recognised how the course has improved the approach to participation. The course structure, learning objectives, status, and the tendency for the GCSE to encourage teachers to see themselves as specialists in citizenship, all help to account for this positive picture.

Defining the content of National Curriculum citizenship

The implementation of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been beset by problems of definition. Issues around the subject title itself have been discussed above. Within the programme of study, too, there is much that is taken out of context or misunderstood.

A major issue lies in the nature and relationship of the three strands: 'enquiry and communication' and 'participation and responsible action' activate the 'knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens'. Enquiry in science and participation in sport, meritorious as they are in their own right, are not about National Curriculum citizenship, unless they are dealing with material from the citizenship programme of study.

There are also difficulties with some of the detail in the strands. One particular problem is in defining the line to be drawn between citizenship and PSHE. As a rule of thumb, citizenship treats at a public dimension what PSHE treats at a personal level. Thus conflict resolution in citizenship is not about the problems experienced in individual parent-teenager relationships. However, topics like bullying, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse, which are naturally the content of PSHE, take on a citizenship dimension when the questions addressed are to do with topical local and national issues, policy, and what can be done to bring about change.

This applies equally to relationships with other subjects. With regard to history, for example, citizenship may draw on the past for illustration, but it is essentially about now and the future. Sometimes the two are very closely interwoven. For example, if the study of the holocaust is to have meaning, pupils must reflect on its implications for today, and 'what they can do' when confronted with cruelty in any form, whether commonplace abuses of human rights such as inequality or new manifestations of genocide. The holocaust is also studied in RE and English, but each addresses the subject matter with its own objectives, as should citizenship. A more straightforward example, already used in Ofsted guidance, relates to the suffragettes.² If one is planning to teach about the importance of voting, clearly this topic provides a good example of the sacrifice made by women to get the vote. This is useful, as is the terminology that historians use in dealing with this and other political movements and events, such as Chartism or the English Civil War. However, while such examples develop understanding and inform, they are not National Curriculum citizenship.

² *Update 43.*

More broadly, some aspects of the curriculum have as yet received little attention. While many pupils have explored in reasonable depth human rights issues, aspects of the law and government, and the media, other areas such as public finance, the diversity of the UK and the role of the European Union are limited or absent. Similarly, the potential of the topical issues section of the enquiry and communications strand is often not realised. This is a potentially very powerful aspect of the programme, to draw on current events in order to address subject content in an active and relevant way across the course.

Participation and responsible action remain an issue in many schools. Most schools create opportunities for some pupils, but in National Curriculum citizenship this should be an entitlement for all. The recent report from the Community Service Volunteers (CSV) shows pupils' interest and willingness to participate in volunteering and community service when given the opportunity. Schools need to continue to explore how such opportunities can be made available as meaningful citizenship experiences.

References

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