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Mr J Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 17 and 18 January 2011 to look at work in history.

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 and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly average and most students make satisfactory progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. Current estimates of performance indicate that achievement is improving. Nevertheless, more students could gain the highest grades at GCSE and boys could achieve higher standards.
- Students develop a sound knowledge and understanding of topics studied. Some have good knowledge and, when given the opportunity, explain their ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions.
- Students investigate sources confidently and assess the value of historical evidence well. They have good enquiry skills, can evaluate sources and explain the significance of people and events in history. They are also developing a good understanding of the importance of analysing different interpretations.

- Students are aware of the benefits of studying history and can explain why the subject is important in their academic and personal development. In the words of a Year 8 student, 'people have a right to know where they came from'.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and on the whole enjoy the lessons. Relationships between students and with teachers are good. Displays celebrate students' work and achievement and exercise books and folders reflect students' good commitment to the subject. Students have positive attitudes to learning, behave well in lessons, and work well together and on their own.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Although teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are satisfactory, some teaching observed during this visit was good.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and reflective about their work. They have high expectations and use their good subject knowledge to help students make links with their previous learning.
- Lessons are planned well and, at Key Stage 3, teachers use a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. These include the effective use of information and communication technology.
- Whereas younger students noted how much they enjoyed the different ways in which they learned history, older students commented that they would like to see more variety in their lessons.
- Although lessons have pace and students are willing to answer questions, opportunities are not always taken to allow them to debate and reflect upon what they are learning. Teachers tend to try to cover too much in a lesson, talk too much and 'spoon-feed' students. As a result, lessons become rushed and students become too reliant upon the teacher.
- Marking is helpful and provides students with effective guidance. At Key Stage 4, students are given detailed advice but, at Key Stage 3, comments on students' work sometimes lack subject-specific guidance.
- Assessment opportunities are being developed at Key Stage 3 to provide students with detailed information about their progress. However, these have not yet been embedded for all year groups into an agreed scheme which develops the full range of concepts and processes. Nor are they yet supported by specific marking guidance and by a collection of moderated work to help teachers in carrying out assessment.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad but does not fully meet requirements.

- Schemes of work do not fully reflect the range and content of the revised programmes of study. For example, local history is underrepresented, and coverage of the different histories and changing relationships through time of the peoples of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales is extremely limited.
- Effective cross-curricular links are developing, particularly with art, literacy and citizenship. The school's arts specialism has had a positive impact upon work in history, particularly in providing opportunities for exploring history through drama.
- Students interviewed during the inspection spoke of how much they had enjoyed the Year 7 visit to Mount Grace Priory and to the battlefields of France. However, curriculum enrichment is underdeveloped. Although students benefit from the valuable opportunity to meet a veteran from the Second World War, such opportunities are not sufficiently wide-ranging.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- In the absence of the current head of department, senior leaders have put in place a series of measures to support history. As a result, there has been an effective focus on maintaining standards and the quality of teaching.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and senior leaders have a clear picture of strengths and areas for improvement. However, overall progress towards improving provision and outcomes has been slow.
- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teachers cooperate well and share good practice readily.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the curriculum at Key Stage 3 meets requirements fully
- providing more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning and to discuss and reflect on what they are learning
- ensuring that assessment procedures at Key Stage 3 develop students' understanding of the full range of key concepts and processes in history and are supported by subject-specific marking guidance and by thorough moderation procedures
- developing detailed schemes of work for all year groups.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector