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Mr S Kenning
Principal
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Dear Mr Kenning

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 23 and 24 March 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Attainment is high and all groups of students make at least good progress in each key stage. Girls' achievements are outstanding in Key Stage 4. Boys also achieve well but the department recognises that they do not always obtain the highest grades.
- In the majority of lessons observed, students made excellent gains in developing their knowledge and understanding. Students explain their ideas clearly in discussion and in their written work, and are able to draw on a wide range of evidence to support their opinions.
- Historical skills are well developed. A significant strength in all key stages is the students' ability to assess the value of historical evidence and then use it to reach substantiated judgements about its significance in history. Students' speaking and listening skills are being developed extremely well.

- History is an extremely popular subject at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and it makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Students are eager to contribute to lessons and have the confidence to ask interesting and perceptive questions in class. They collaborate well in pairs and small group discussions.
- The department has a clear understanding and commitment to developing independent learning skills. Personal extended projects at Key Stage 3 include opportunities for all students to choose and plan research, be creative in approach and take risks. Students say how much they value these opportunities.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge and classroom expertise to create a range of engaging learning activities which helps students to make excellent progress. Students are particularly appreciative of the range and quality of support they receive from their teachers.
- Lessons are very well planned, have clear learning objectives and are suitably challenging and tailored to meet the needs of all students. The department acknowledges that more work is required to develop extended writing skills so that boys in particular are challenged fully to demonstrate exceptional performance.
- Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships between staff and students. Teachers create many varied opportunities for students to develop their understanding and take responsibility for their own learning.
- A range of assessment techniques is used deftly to monitor students' progress and adjust provision to help them to improve. Marking in books is excellent, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. It ensures that students are clear about the next steps in learning and how to take them.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The curriculum ensures that students develop a strong set of historical skills underpinned by excellent historical understanding. Students' understanding of 'power and protest' and 'changes in ideas, beliefs and attitudes' are particularly well developed and central to the department's curriculum planning.
- At Key Stage 3, the two-year curriculum is broad, well-balanced and meets statutory requirements. However, planning for progression in key concepts and key processes, including sharing the criteria for success, are not yet fully developed.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, detailed programmes of study have been developed which carefully reflect examination requirements.
- The range of visits and enrichment opportunities for all students lends a real vibrancy to the curriculum. They particularly enjoy the cross-curricular

Black History and Holocaust thematic study days, as well as the opportunity to engage in extended personal research projects. Students talk animatedly about how these activities strengthen their learning.

- The quality of provision overall enables students, not only to make excellent progress, but also to make thoughtful comparisons across time and to reflect perceptively about what they thought were the 'lessons of history'.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management in history are outstanding.

- The history department is led and managed extremely well. The head of department provides clear direction and rigorously monitors and evaluates the work of the department against the most stretching of benchmarks to successfully improve provision.
- Assessment and target-setting systems are exemplary and used effectively to secure high-quality intervention for any students in danger of underachieving. These systems make a significant contribution to students' progress.
- There is an excellent ethos and culture of teamwork throughout the department. Teachers have high expectations and are committed to developing, sharing and strengthening their expertise.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the quality of boys' extended written work so that they are consistently challenged to reach the highest grades
- ensuring that there is an explicit and well-defined approach to progression in subject-specific skills at Key Stage 3 to enable teachers and students to evaluate progress more effectively across the curriculum.

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

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector