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Mr A Roberts  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Roberts

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 January 2012 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly average and students make satisfactory progress overall, with considerable variation between the key stages.
- At GCSE, attainment is above average. Most students make good progress during Key Stage 4 and some make outstanding progress. As a percentage of the whole cohort, the proportion of students taking history at GCSE is below average.
- At Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. Some make good progress, as seen in the work completed by Year 8 students on trench warfare and its impact on soldiers' morale.

- Students have good chronological understanding and they investigate sources competently. However, at Key Stage 3 they are unsure about how to check the accuracy of accounts and sources, why people and events are significant in history, and why different interpretations must be handled with care.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They have positive attitudes to learning, behave extremely well in lessons and work well together and on their own. Relationships are good. Students like history and enjoy their lessons.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- In this small school, history is taught by two teachers, though most classes are taught by the head of department. Both teachers have good subject knowledge, are enthusiastic about the subject and are reflective about their work. Their commitment is recognised by the students and those taking GCSE history feel particularly well supported in their work.
- While teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are good at GCSE, they are satisfactory at Key Stage 3.
- Lessons are well organised and teachers use a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning. However, students' use of ICT is variable and opportunities are missed to exploit this technology fully.
- While the pace of learning is brisk, teachers try to cover too much, which limits opportunities for reflection, discussion and debate in lessons.
- At GCSE, teachers use ongoing assessment skilfully to ensure that students make at least good progress. However, such effective practice is not yet embedded at Key Stage 3 where teachers' expectations and the level of challenge are not always aligned closely enough to students' needs.
- Marking is variable. Where it is most helpful, it provides students with effective guidance. At GCSE, students are given detailed advice but, at Key Stage 3, too many comments on students' work lack subject-specific guidance.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- Students are fascinated by the topics they study as part of the GCSE modern world history course and this curriculum promotes their academic development well.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers a range of topics, from the early medieval period to the late 20th century. However, there is insufficient coverage of all aspects of the programmes of study and the curriculum

does not give enough attention to answering key historical questions through enquires which combine depth, overview and thematic studies.

- Schemes of work at Key Stage 3 provide a general outline of what should be taught. However, there is insufficient focus upon answering key historical questions through enquires and on developing students' historical concepts and processes as they move through the key stage. Moreover, tasks and assessments are not aligned closely enough with the schemes of work to provide students with sufficient opportunities to deepen their historical thinking and understanding.
- Students' written literacy is well developed in history and links with English are effective. However, cross-curricular links are underdeveloped.
- Older students interviewed spoke of how much they had enjoyed visits to historical sites when they had been in Key Stage 3. However, curriculum enrichment opportunities are too limited.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and well motivated. The impact of her effective leadership is seen in the marked improvement in results at GCSE. However, in pursuing improvements in examination results there has been insufficient attention paid to improving provision and outcomes at Key Stage 3.
- The subject is well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Support for the other teacher of history is good.
- Self-evaluation is satisfactory and the department is developing a clear picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the head of department has identified that, at Key Stage 3, students' wider historical skills are underdeveloped.
- Opportunities to strengthen expertise in the subject by developing partnerships with other schools and external agencies have not been fully exploited.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- developing assessment practice at Key Stage 3 to ensure that:
  - in lessons, expectation and challenge are more closely aligned to students' needs
  - students are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- strengthening provision at Key Stage 3 by ensuring that the curriculum covers a sufficient range of topics through a combination of depth, overview and thematic studies
- ensuring that schemes of work at Key Stage 3 identify clearly the concepts and processes being developed and that the tasks and assessments which

are aligned to them provide students with opportunities to deepen their historical thinking and understanding

- strengthening expertise within the department by exploiting more fully opportunities to develop partnerships with other schools and external agencies in regard to provision for history.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Michael Maddison**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**