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Mr M Cording  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Cording

### **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 6 and 7 March 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 four lessons that were jointly observed with a member of the academy's leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of history is inadequate.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is inadequate.

- From low starting points, students do not secure sufficient gains in history by the time they complete their studies at the end of either Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4. Consequently, the progress that students make is inadequate.
- Weaknesses in the curriculum and in teaching mean that students are unable to acquire the depth of history-specific skills, knowledge and understanding that they need in order to achieve well. These weaknesses are compounded by the lack of a subject leader to drive improvement and the lack of enough experienced subject-specialist teachers to accelerate rates of achievement.

- The department's assessment of students' progress and attainment over time is inaccurate. Teachers lack the experience and subject-specialist knowledge needed to evaluate students' current performance correctly.
- The proportion of students attaining grades A\* to C in GCSE history is declining over time and in 2011 fell sharply to be significantly below the national average. Boys' progress is significantly weaker than girls' and very few students attain the highest grades at GCSE.
- The numbers opting to study history at Key Stage 4 are small and decreasing year-on-year. Currently, no students take history in the sixth form. The achievement of a small number of students who completed their A-level study in 2010 and 2011 was satisfactory.

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

The quality of teaching in history is inadequate.

- Teachers are committed to improving the quality of teaching. However, too much teaching remains inadequate. Satisfactory teaching takes place, but the quality of the satisfactory lessons is not good enough to secure the necessary improvement in students' attainment quickly and securely.
- Most lessons contain objectives designed to support learning at different levels but the extent to which they influence students' learning is negligible as all students do the same task, regardless of their differing starting points.
- Lessons are typified by frequent teacher-directed input which limits the opportunities for students to steer their learning and develop their own explanations. This denies teachers the chance to identify students' misconceptions and to be able to adapt their teaching in response.
- Opportunities for students to develop their skills of extended writing are minimal and too often truncated by the dominance of worksheet-based activities requiring limited written responses. As a result, students' ability to develop the analytical and discursive writing skills necessary to access the higher levels and grades is restricted.
- Marking is regularly undertaken and is congratulatory. However, teachers do not provide precise subject-specific feedback which clearly identifies what students need to do to improve. This, in part, explains why students are unable to articulate with sufficient precision how well they are doing in history. Students are not expected to respond routinely to written feedback with the result that the impact on marking of their progress is diminished.

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

The quality of the curriculum in history is inadequate.

- The curriculum does not provide an enquiry-based approach to learning which in turn limits the opportunities for students to discover and make connections or links by exploring history through a blend of themes, depth studies and overviews. Consequently, students see history as a series of

disconnected topics and demonstrate an episodic knowledge of course content, particularly in Key Stage 3.

- Planning does not ensure that students are given regular and well-planned opportunities to develop their understanding of key historical concepts and processes. This, in part, explains why too much teaching lacks sufficient momentum, purpose and challenge.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 meets students' needs in terms of content and interest. However, it is inadequate because students' previous experiences in history mean that they are ill-prepared for the skills and concepts being tested at Key Stage 4.
- Students' understanding of how national and international events have shaped local developments, and vice versa, is extremely limited.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is inadequate.

- Interim departmental leadership arrangements have not given the department sufficient capacity to drive improvement and eliminate key weaknesses. The development of teachers' skills has not been tackled with sufficient vigour and determination and, despite a recent promising appointment, key weaknesses in the quality of teaching remain.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified the areas most in need of attention and they have recently put together clear and detailed plans to affect the rapid improvement required to raise students' achievement. However, these very recent initiatives are yet to have a measurable and proven impact on students' achievement.
- Senior leaders recognise that ensuring the validity of assessment information is a priority. They have recently put together a programme involving the use of external support to help teachers establish a clear and accurate benchmark of the current performance of students and to deal with the legacy of underperformance of GCSE students. However, as this has only just begun, its impact is extremely limited.

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

- raising achievement for all groups of students in Key Stages 3 and 4 by:
  - strengthening the leadership and management of teaching in history
  - ensuring that, with external support, recently introduced plans rapidly improve the quality of teaching in order to support students' consistently good progress
  - ensuring that an explicit and well-defined approach is in place for planning for progression in subject-specific skills and extending opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills to improve their analytical and discursive writing

- developing assessment systems that enable teachers and students to have a clear and accurate understanding of students' progress in history
- making full use of the rich local and cultural heritage to develop students' understanding of the relationship between local developments and history on a national and international scale.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Karl Sampson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**