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Mr S Hainey  
Principal  
Harris Academy South Norwood  
2 Cumberlow Avenue  
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Dear Mr Hainey

### **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 22 and 23 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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment is broadly average but, given their low starting points, students make good progress in their work.
- For the last three years, results at GCSE have improved considerably year on year. Whereas the proportions of students gaining grades A\* to A and A\* to C were below the national average in 2011, they were more than twice the proportions which gained those grades in 2009. This has been achieved through determined leadership and good teaching, together with a series of focused and effective interventions. Current estimates of performance indicate that attainment is expected to rise again in 2012 and that more students are on track to attain the higher grades.

- In the sixth form, students enjoy the A-level course, are challenged in their studies, and their work and lessons show that most students are making good progress in their learning.
- At Key Stage 3, students make good progress in developing their historical knowledge and understanding. However, opportunities are missed for all students to develop and refine their analytical and discursive writing skills. As a result, they are not consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest levels.
- The development of students' historical thinking is good. It is stronger at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3 where it is uneven. For example, younger students are developing effective enquiry skills, especially through the Independent Learning Projects which are set as homework tasks. However, they struggled to explain how evidence might be checked for accuracy, 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. Students like history, are clear on the value of studying the subject and enjoy the lessons. Students have very positive attitudes to learning, behave well in lessons and work well together and on their own. A good climate for learning is in place. The subject is increasingly popular and take-up at both GCSE and in the sixth form is good and increasing.

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

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about the subject. Strong relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and students help to facilitate good learning.
- Lessons are well organised; planning is thorough and students are clear about what is expected. Teachers use a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. Younger students noted how much they enjoyed the different ways in which they learnt history.
- Highly effective support is provided for examination groups. Students appreciate the advice given by teachers and their willingness to provide additional guidance through revision booklets, out-of-school revision sessions and the revision residential weekend.
- Questioning is a strength of teaching, and teachers probe students' knowledge and understanding well. When given the opportunity, students explain their ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions. However, teachers are sometimes too keen to pass on their knowledge to students and try to cover too much. As a result, sufficient opportunities are not provided for students to discuss, reflect upon and debate what they are learning.
- In addition, students are not always required to turn short oral answers into full sentences which would assist them when they move on to write their ideas. As a result, opportunities for students to develop formal rather than informal explanations are not always taken.

- 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 and written feedback are good, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students in all key stages receive increasingly helpful subject-specific advice which clearly shows them how to improve.

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

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- At Key Stage 3, the two-year curriculum covers a broad range of appropriate topics from prehistory to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the curriculum does not give enough attention to answering key historical questions through enquires which combine depth, overview and thematic studies.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form promotes students' academic development well. Students enjoy the examination specifications and, at A level, they particularly like studying topics they haven't studied at GCSE, for example, super-power relations after 1945.
- A number of cross-curricular projects, such as those offered by history teachers during the 'innovation weeks', help to enrich students' learning in history and contribute effectively to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. However, enrichment opportunities through visits to museums and places of historic interest are not fully exploited.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and extremely well motivated. She has worked successfully to improve provision and outcomes in the three years she has been at the academy. The impact of her effective leadership is seen in the rapidly improving results at GCSE and in the popularity of the subject among older students.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and of a high quality. The department has an accurate and detailed view of strengths and areas for improvement. The priorities and areas for action are highly appropriate.
- The subject is extremely well resourced and the department uses its resources carefully. A strong collaborative spirit exists which helps to explain why students make good progress.
- Strong links exist in history between the secondary schools in the academy federation. However, curriculum and assessment links in history with neighbouring primary schools, to ensure that from the start of Year 7 students can make swift progress in this subject, are underdeveloped.

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

- ensuring good and outstanding achievement for all students, by:
  - embedding opportunities for students to strengthen their analytical and discursive writing skills
  - providing students with regular opportunities to explain their ideas formally when discussing and debating what they are learning
  - developing teaching strategies to ensure that in lessons expectation and challenge are more closely aligned to students' needs
  - ensuring that the curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers an appropriate range of topics, through a combination of depth, overview and thematic studies
  - establishing closer curriculum and assessment links with neighbouring primary schools to ensure that from the start of Year 7 students can make swift progress in developing their historical knowledge, thinking and understanding.

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

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