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Ms P Dodgshon
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Dodgshon

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit with Patrick Geraghty HMI on 16 and 17 May 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 11 lessons, three of which were jointly observed with a representative of the school's leadership team

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly average and overall students make satisfactory progress in their work. Some make good progress. However, the level of expectation and challenge in some lessons is not sufficient to ensure that achievement is good for all students.
- At Key Stage 3, students are developing a sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. In their writing, and when given the opportunity in lessons, they explain their ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions.
- For the last three years the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C and A* to A at GCSE has fallen year-on-year. The number of students

taking history has also fallen. The department has put in place a series of measures to raise attainment for all groups. Current estimates of performance indicate that attainment is expected to rise this year and more students are on track to achieve, and some to surpass, their targets.

- In the sixth form, students enjoy the A-level course, are challenged in their studies and make satisfactory progress in their learning. Some students make good progress.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and enjoy their lessons, in which they behave well and work well together and on their own. There is a good climate for learning at all key stages. In Year 7, there is a palpable 'buzz' for learning and here students are developing as highly effective enquirers and independent learners.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, are enthusiastic about the subject and reflective about their work.
- Lessons are well organised and teachers use a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. Younger students noted in particular how much they enjoyed the different ways in which they learnt history.
- Although lessons are usually well-paced, teachers are sometimes too keen to pass on their knowledge to students and try to cover too much. As a result, questioning is not always used effectively to develop students' historical thinking and students have insufficient opportunities to discuss, reflect upon and debate what they are learning. However, in the best lessons teachers' questioning is highly effective in helping to develop students' thinking and understanding in history.
- Marking is variable. Where it is most helpful, it provides students with effective guidance and clear pointers for improvement. However, such good practice is not consistent across the department. In addition, marking practice does not routinely provide opportunities for students to respond to teachers' verbal and written comments and engage in a dialogue of learning and assessment.
- In some lessons, teachers use ongoing assessment skilfully to ensure that students make good progress. However, such effective practice is not yet a consistent feature of teaching in history and teachers' expectations are not always aligned closely enough to students' needs.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers a range of appropriate topics. Changes to the school curriculum at Key Stage 3, though, mean that the history curriculum is currently in the process of transition.

- The department is aware that planning for progression in the full range of key historical concepts and processes is not clearly identified in all year groups at Key Stage 3. As a result, the tasks and assessments which are aligned to them do not provide students with sufficient opportunities to apply their developing historical knowledge to answering challenging historical questions and thereby deepen their historical thinking and understanding.
- At Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, students enjoy the examination specifications which promote their academic development well. At A level, students particularly like the variety of topics they study and the opportunity to undertake an in-depth historical enquiry.
- Although students benefit from a number of visits to places of historical interest and visitors, including a presentation by a Holocaust survivor, enrichment opportunities are limited.
- History makes an effective contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through studying, for example, the slave trade and human rights in Year 7, and the Holocaust in Year 9.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- The head of department leads a group of subject-specialists who are focused on improving provision and outcomes in history. She is well motivated and is working hard to increase the numbers of students who opt to take history beyond the age of 14 and to raising attainment at all key stages.
- Self-evaluation is accurate; the department has identified appropriate areas for further improvement. However, related plans currently lack precision.
- The department runs smoothly on a day-to day basis; teachers cooperate well and routinely share ideas and resources.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring good and outstanding achievement for all groups of students, by:
 - developing teaching strategies to ensure that in lessons expectation and challenge are more closely aligned to students' needs and that students have more opportunities to discuss, debate and reflect upon what they are learning
 - embedding highly effective marking and assessment practice which is applied consistently and provides routine opportunities for students to respond to teachers' verbal and written comments and engage in a dialogue of learning and assessment
 - strengthening provision at Key Stage 3 by ensuring that the curriculum identifies clearly the full range of historical concepts and processes and that the tasks and assessments which are

aligned to them provide students with opportunities to apply their developing historical knowledge to answering challenging historical questions and thereby deepen their historical 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