

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



17 April 2007

Mr G Boyle  
Headteacher  
St Nicholas Catholic High School  
Greenbank Lane  
Hartford  
Northwich  
Cheshire  
CW8 1JW

Dear Mr Boyle

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit I made 12 and 13 March 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff, talking with students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards are well above average.

- In 2006 80% of students achieved Grades A\*-C in history. This represented an improvement on results in the previous year; when performance was also well above average. Performance at A-level is also above average.
- Attainment on entry is above average. Students' work becomes increasingly accurate and sophisticated as they progress through the school. They develop a good sense of chronology. They are increasingly able to marshal information to support an argument. Their analysis of sources is good. By Year 11 they are able to relate

source material to contextual knowledge and reach balanced points of view on historical issues. Their evaluation of the usefulness of source material is less well developed.

- Students find history interesting and enjoy their lessons. Their personal development is very good. They are polite and concentrate well. Their behaviour in the lessons observed was excellent.

### Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning in history is good.

- Lessons are structured well. They contain a good variety of activities, sequenced carefully so that a good rate of progress is maintained and students' interest and motivation is sustained. Well-conceived 'starter' activities are used successfully to help students settle into lessons very quickly. Video conferencing and theatre groups provide additional stimulus for the students. However, more able students do not always feel sufficiently challenged in lessons. Teachers' do not often encourage students to identify and answer their own historical questions or challenge students to provide more sophisticated answers.
- Systems for tracking the progress made by students are used well to identify individuals who are underachieving. Comment-based marking is helping students to understand what they are doing well and how to improve, but the quality of marking varies between teachers. Students gave varied responses to questions about how well they are doing in history and what they needed to do to improve.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- A thoughtful approach to curriculum development has resulted in well-organised, broadly-based schemes of work that capture students' interest. Changes have been made to schemes of work as a result of evaluating pupils' responses to units of study. Good account is taken of the areas studied by students at primary school to avoid unnecessary repetition and duplication. Sixth form students have been consulted about the topics most useful to them and changes made accordingly. Adaptations resulting from the school's specialism in Business Enterprise have made the history curriculum more relevant to students. Classroom activities have been adapted to ensure the study of enterprise and leadership within historical contexts, but do not always enable students to practice the associated skills.
- The very good range of enrichment activities makes a strong contribution to students' personal development. For example, their

social, moral and spiritual development is supported well by work on the Holocaust, culminating in the 'Holocaust day'. This leads to some good quality extended writing by students and leaves a strong impression on them.

## Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- There is a good connection between senior leadership and subject leadership. The head of department responds well to the ethos of constant improvement established by the senior leaders. Strong professional relationships characterise the work of the department.
- The department is organised well. Activities are reviewed regularly and this results in changes in practice. Limited use is made of pupils' views, particularly in the sixth form, but this is not systematic.
- Whilst self-evaluation is thoughtful and accurately identifies areas for improvement, the 'Self-evaluation Form' completed by the department is largely descriptive and does not present the same clearly focussed view of teaching and learning elicited through discussion.
- Activities in the departmental development plan relate clearly to the outcomes of review and self-evaluation. There is clear evidence of the activities in the plan being implemented.
- The developments implemented by the department are leading to improvements in standards that are already high.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Students relate very well to each other in lessons. Students from Black minority ethnic backgrounds are integrated well. Schemes of work incorporate multi-cultural dimensions.
- Students with English as an additional language are provided with peer 'buddies' who help them in lessons.
- Students with learning difficulties are given appropriate help.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- encouraging students to become more independent learners by helping them to pose, research and answer their own questions in order to heighten their historical understanding
- ensure that the most able students are challenged more.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school. As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss  
Her Majesty's Inspector