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Mr Paul Morrissey
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Dear Mr Morrissey

Ofsted survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 and 04 December 2007 to inspect work in history, including the pilot GCSE course.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and a review of a sample of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

These are outstanding overall. Standards in history are well above average.

- Teacher assessment at Key Stage 3 in 2007 shows students achieve significantly higher results than both the national averages and other foundation subjects in school.
- GCSE results for 2007 are well above average, including the proportion of both boys and girls achieving the highest A*-A grades, which represents outstanding achievement. The standards reached so far by students undertaking the pilot GCSE course are above average and reflect good achievement in relation to students' abilities.

- The school's Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level results show continued improvement, with 82% achieving grade C or above at A2 and 84% at AS level in 2007. Most students met or exceeded their targets.
- Students' personal development in history is outstanding. Students, including those studying the pilot GCSE course, enjoy history, behave very well and contribute eagerly to lessons. They respond thoughtfully to challenging and sensitive issues, for example when visiting the First World War battlefields and local war memorials. A high proportion of students opt to study history at GCSE and AS/A level.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- This judgement reflects the department's current transitional stage, having recently experienced significant staffing changes.
- Some teaching is outstanding and teachers use their excellent knowledge of the subject and examination requirements in lively lessons which capture students' interest and enthusiasm for learning. All lesson plans have good features, but there is some inconsistency.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good and often outstanding. These, together with students' very positive attitudes, help to ensure that students make good progress.
- The department makes very good use of peer- and self-assessment to help students to understand what they have achieved and how to improve. Students respond well, making carefully considered and pertinent comments on their own and each others' work.
- The department has reviewed its formal assessment procedures for Key Stage 3. Assignments enable students to achieve high levels, but the department has not yet moderated its work against national exemplars.
- Teaching and learning in the GCSE pilot is also good overall. Teachers have drawn well on existing strengths and made good use of opportunities to develop new approaches. Teachers have provided very good guidance to students on assessments.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- Good consideration has been given to developing a relevant and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of learners at each key stage. The department is well-placed to manage further modifications to meet the revised Key Stage 3 programme of study and AS/A level revisions.

- The curriculum for the pilot GCSE is aligned with the requirements of the specification. The school has used the opportunities provided to introduce some innovative topics.
- There is an excellent range of visits and other enrichment activities, including visits to sites abroad, to extend students' learning and enjoyment.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- There is a strong sense of purpose and a clear commitment to continuous improvement, as is illustrated in department's work to develop the curriculum it provides. Leadership of teaching and learning, including leadership by example, are outstanding.
- Leadership and management of the pilot GCSE course reflect the same high standards.

Inclusion

The department makes good provision for the needs of all learners. This is reflected in the similar standards reached by both boys and girls. The high proportion of students who achieve at the highest level demonstrates good provision for the most able. Conscious of the wider range of ability in school, including those opting to study GCSE history, the department has good plans to improve its provision for the least able.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- refining lesson planning to ensure greater consistency
- moderating Key Stage 3 assessments against national exemplar materials.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector