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17 April 2008

Mrs J Edmonds  
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Dear Mrs Edmonds

Ofsted survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 and 26 March 2008 to inspect work in history.

As well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on school visits to places of historical interest.

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: visits to four classes, interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and a review of a sample of pupils' work.

The overall quality of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards in history are above average and students make good progress.

- The comment above on progress applies equally to all groups of students including those with learning difficulties. It also applies across the whole age range including the sixth form.
- I saw examples of well-argued, well-written essays and other pieces of writing with evidence carefully deployed to support judgements.

Students are developing their ability to write concisely and this is clearly contributing to GCSE success.

- Some of the work I saw in Year 11 was of a very high standard, suggesting that some students could already be engaged in AS Level study.
- Pupils' personal development, encouraged by what they learn in history, is very good. One simple example was their response in a class studying the role of women in Nazi Germany. They readily drew comparisons with the present and displayed clear moral values when doing so. Students are also increasingly confident when talking about history. This was clear in my formal interviews and from what I saw in class.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The learning is good because students are willing to learn. They have good attitudes to the subject and behaviour in history classes is excellent. The only weakness I noted is that some students could work faster and need to be encouraged to do so.
- Teachers have a very positive attitude to the subject and are keen for students to do well. Teachers have good intimate knowledge of the topics they are teaching and they are also willing to try new things; for example, the innovative, cross-curricular study of Native American history drawing on the college's technology status.
- The quality of marking is generally high, and in the sixth form I saw some impressive examples of self-evaluation by students which were then endorsed by the teacher.
- There is a reasonable balance in classes between teachers talking, students listening and students working. However, there is still much scope for students to take more initiative in posing questions and finding answers.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- It reflects well, the National Curriculum and examination specifications. It is also innovative; for example, by the definition of a theme to characterise a period in British history.
- Useful thinking has already been done on the new Key Stage 3 – some of which has been undertaken collaboratively with other schools. But this now needs to be pursued with a little more urgency because of its introduction in September. My understanding of initial thinking suggests that insufficient emphasis is being put on providing students with knowledge that is likely to help them as adults in the UK.

## Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- The head of department is well respected in school. She has developed a strong collegiate approach with other historians and a successful dialogue with senior managers.
- She and the school's senior managers have a very good understanding of the role of the subject in the curriculum and its performance. This is particularly well aided by very careful analysis of a wide range of data available on students' progress.
- The head of department is appropriately cautious in moving forward. The subject is successful so she is rightly concerned not to upset what is being done well. There is significant innovation; for example, the introduction of the humanities course and new initiatives using assessment data to improve learning. However, as the head of department acknowledges, it is now time for further development linked particularly to Key Stage 3 and learning styles.

## Subject issue: History Visits

There are a number of history visits which connect well with the curriculum. Recent or planned visits include a Year 8 visit to St Paul's linked to work on the Great Fire and a Year 9 trip to Ypres linked to the Great War. Both students and staff value visits not only for the history learnt but also because of their contribution to students' personal development. A good example of this was the impact on students of seeing war graves and the focus on the Christmas Truce. But I note the head of department's view that they are becoming more difficult to organise because of costs, legal pressures and the impact on students' learning of all subjects when they are withdrawn from regular lessons for periods of time.

## Inclusion

As indicated above, the evidence indicates clearly that all groups are doing equally well in history in the college. I saw one lesson with a teaching assistant in which she provided helpful support to two students. The ability range in the classes I attended was clearly wide but both teachers and students dealt with this well. The provision of the humanities GCSE option for students not well-suited to the history GCSE course is clearly working well because of the impressive results. Although the amount of history taught is reduced, nevertheless the integrity of the subject is preserved in the challenging work I saw.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included the need to ensure that:

- more opportunities are provided to enable students to become more independent in their learning of history
- the curriculum is developed so that it becomes even more relevant to students.

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

Paul Armitage  
Additional Inspector