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Mrs J Pruchniewicz
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Dear Mrs Pruchniewicz

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 and 27 February to look at work in history.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on information and communication technology (ICT).

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 and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work and the observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good but standards vary between the two key stages.

- Below average standards in Key Stage 3 are associated with the low attainment on entry and weak literacy skills of many students; however, students make good progress through Years 7 to 9.
- At GCSE standards are above average and are rising. In 2007 the school had its best ever results with 71% of students gaining grades A*-C and 28% gaining grades A*-A. This was a considerable improvement on previous years, exceeded national averages, and meant that history was one of the best performing subjects in the school at GCSE in that year.

- Lesson observations, discussions with students and the scrutiny of work showed that achievement is generally good. Students can demonstrate a considerable knowledge of the issues they have covered in class and can apply historical skills, such as extracting evidence from sources of information, across a range of topics. This was particularly noticeable in the lessons on opposition to Hitler in Nazi Germany and on the different political groupings in Northern Ireland.
- The personal development of students in history is good. They are enthusiastic about the subject and are keen to learn. Behaviour in lessons is good, as are relationships between students and between students and staff. Attitudes to learning are good and most students take a pride in their work. All these factors combine to create a favourable climate for learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is lively and engages students well. The students appreciate the range of teaching and learning strategies which are employed and which help them to be focussed and to make good progress.
- Lessons are well organised, involve challenging and varied activities, and proceed at a good pace. Stimulating displays in teaching rooms support the learning well and reflect the variety of activities and tasks set and the engagement of the students in their work. Displays also provide clear guidance, for example, on how to improve at Key Stage 3 by showing what is expected at each level.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements. They use this well in questioning to extend students' understanding and skills.
- Good planning means that students are presented with well sequenced lessons which effectively develop their historical knowledge and understanding. Lesson objectives are made explicit and students are regularly reminded of the focus as lessons progress. This supports learning well.
- The opportunity is taken in most lessons for students to develop their speaking and listening skills. However, insufficient time is allocated for discussions and opportunities are missed for students to reflect upon what they are learning. As a result the understanding of some students is not as well developed as their knowledge and skills.
- Marking is regular and thorough and comments are constructive, give praise and identify how work can be improved. Assessment is accurate and students understand the systems that are used. They know their levels and targets and can explain what they need to do to improve. This contributes to students being enthusiastic learners who make good progress.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the demands of the examination specifications. It is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 and has some good links to other areas of the curriculum, notably to geography and religious education in the Dewsbury Project and to citizenship through the study of such topics as 'the development of the franchise' and 'from slavery to civil rights'.
- At Key Stage 4 the students follow the Schools History Project course. They undoubtedly enjoy this course and can talk animatedly about what they have learned as well as appreciate the significance of what they have studied. This was particularly marked in the discussion I had with the Year 11 students about the development of Middleham Castle.
- The department is self-critical and keeps the curriculum under review. For example, it is reviewing the curriculum at Key Stage 3 at the moment and is considering a thematic approach.
- Schemes of work and suggested lesson plans are thorough and provide an effective basis for teachers to prepare their lessons. However, as yet the department does not identify specific tasks to improve basic literacy skills.
- Students value the range of visits provided and the richness of the curriculum both inside and outside the classroom contributes to students' enjoyment of the subject.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The head of department leads the subject well and he has created an environment which is highly conducive to learning. There is clear commitment to improvement and to raising standards throughout the department and this is accompanied by enthusiasm for the subject, good subject knowledge, hard work and effective teamwork.
- The department is well organised and has high expectations. The head of department has readily taken on board new teaching and learning strategies and teachers have effectively assimilated them into their teaching repertoire.
- Documentation is clear and well presented. The department has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. The work of the department is well monitored. Systems are in place to ensure both consistency and accuracy of marking and assessment and to facilitate the sharing of good practice.
- The department benefits from a positive ethos and sits within a supportive humanities faculty structure. Members of staff are committed to meeting the needs of the students and to helping them to achieve their potential.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- All classrooms have interactive whiteboards and staff use ICT equipment regularly and effectively to support learning.
- Students enjoy the variety of teaching methods employed through the use of the technology. For example, 'anagram' starters, 'matching terms and definitions' and 'identifying the missing words' are all used to stimulate the students and to strengthen the learning. The use of PowerPoint presentations and video clips also serve to motivate and to extend knowledge and understanding.
- However, the opportunities for students to use ICT have not yet been formally identified in departmental planning. As a result opportunities are not always taken to develop students' ICT skills.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Inclusion is a clear priority not only for the department but for the school as a whole. The department has responded well to the diverse nature of the student cohort through its curriculum and its teaching and learning strategies.
- Lower attaining and higher attaining students are well catered for with precise learning opportunities and tasks being increasingly identified in the schemes of work.
- Any differences in performance between boys and girls are carefully monitored with appropriate action taken to address the issues.
- Revision sessions for Year 11 students are differentiated to meet the needs of different abilities and this targeted approach helps to explain the improvements seen at GCSE in 2007.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing departmental schemes of work which formally identify precise opportunities for the use of ICT and specific tasks to improve basic literacy skills
- developing teaching and learning strategies to include more opportunities for students to discuss and reflect upon what they are learning.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector