

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs S Dunford  
Headteacher  
Southfield School for Girls  
Lewis Road  
Kettering  
Northamptonshire  
NN15 6HE

Dear Mrs Dunford

Ofsted survey inspection programme - history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 and 12 May 2009 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 the promotion of independent learning in history and on the department's contribution to community cohesion.

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 you, staff and students, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work and the observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding and standards are significantly above average.

- Students' make excellent progress in their lessons and over time. In Year 7, for example, students are developing an in-depth understanding of the Roman Empire, while those in Year 11 have made excellent progress in their understanding of Elizabethan England, including religion, overseas exploration and the importance of Mary Queen of Scots. Students in the sixth form have excellent knowledge and understanding of social and political developments in Russia between 1894 and 1941.
- At all ages, students have highly developed skills in using and interpreting a wide range of historical evidence. They can detect bias

and have excellent skills at evaluating sources. They can present arguments well. Students' appreciation of chronology is well developed and they can make good links over the centuries, for example on the improvements in medicine through time.

- Many students have well developed skills in reading and writing, which the subject promotes well. Higher attaining students write extensively, accurately, and for different audiences and purposes.
- Recent examination results have improved significantly and 89.6% of students gained grades A\* to C in the 2008 GCSE examinations, with almost half gaining an A\* or A grade. Both figures are considerably higher than the national average. The subject is one of the most successful in the school. The school's internal tracking data indicates, however, that results for the current Year 11 will fall because of the prior attainment of the cohort. At A level all students passed in 2008, with 85.7% gaining A-C grades, which is significantly higher than the national average. At AS level, all students passed but results for grades A-C were slightly below average. However, in the January resits, all have achieved grades in line with expectations.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They are well prepared for their lessons and settle down to work quickly. They sustain their concentration on the tasks set.

### Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they use well, both in oral questioning and in written feedback, to extend the students' understanding. The teachers' knowledge of examination requirements is exceptionally strong and this enables students to achieve even higher standards.
- Activities are briskly paced, with time efficiently used. The excellent range of activities planned enables the students to make excellent progress. Learning activities are well managed and the students enjoy learning the subject.
- Teachers have appropriately high expectations of all students and provide good challenge for them. Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships. This ethos enables lessons to be purposeful within a friendly but firm environment.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject. Students reported that the teachers are hardworking, are easy to approach and will always help them.
- Lessons are planned in detail and identify learning objectives and outcomes. These are routinely shared with the students. However, targets for particular groups of students, for example those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those with English as an additional language and those identified as gifted and talented, are not routinely identified explicitly in the planning.
- The quality of marking is excellent. Students' work is regularly marked and evaluative comments are routinely made by the teachers. Further targets for improvement are identified if and when appropriate. The

marking is useful for students to enhance their progress and they commented on how valuable they found the teachers' comments.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad, meets requirements and has excellent depth. Planning for the revised Key Stage 3 has been undertaken and schemes of work are being developed well for the current Year 7.
- There is excellent coverage of the programmes of study, with excellent development of students' historical skills. Much beneficial work has been undertaken to ensure that students' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening are well developed.
- The organisation of the curriculum ensures that there is strong continuity and progression from Year 7 to Year 13. The development of chronological understanding for younger students is a notable feature.
- The department has identified an able group of historians in Year 10 who can meet GCSE requirements in a much shorter space of time. The timetable has been appropriately reorganised to meet this need.
- Students' learning experiences are enhanced by visits to a wide range of historical places. This includes Boughton House, Manor House Museum, while others have also visited Warwick Castle and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Nottinghamshire. The department runs a history club every week and presents an ongoing history reading challenge for all students.
- The study of history is supported by the use of information and communication technology (ICT). This is used generally well, for example for research purposes on the internet and for presentations.

## Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are outstanding.

- The department benefits from outstanding leadership. The head of department provides clear direction to the work of the department and she is well respected by colleagues. The work of the department is underpinned by an appropriate development plan.
- The department has strong management structures. There is an accurate analysis of strengths and weaknesses through robust procedures for checking on the work of the department. These include the regular observation of lessons, scrutinising the students' work, and seeking the views of students about how to improve provision.
- Staff are hard working and the department has good team spirit. All staff, for example, take responsibility for developing different aspects of the curriculum.
- Assessment and target setting procedures are thorough. Students know their targets and recognise that these are followed through regularly by their teachers. Progress towards the targets is regularly evaluated and any students in danger of underachieving are quickly identified and appropriate action taken. The thoroughness of this process contributes greatly to students' progress.

- The outstanding leadership and management have ensured that the department has become one of the most successful within the school and it achieves high results.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of students' independent learning is outstanding.

- Students are taught within a friendly and purposeful environment. They are encouraged to work in groups and pairs on a regular basis. They do this successfully.
- One of the features of the high quality of teaching is that students are set tasks which require them to undertake lengthy research work, for instance on the internet, or for them to write extensively and for different audiences and purposes. They do this exceptionally well.
- The motivation of individuals is high. This leads to independent work, often done outside the classroom, which is of a high standard.
- Students said they valued the written feedback on their work which enabled them to work well towards the individual targets set for them.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of the department to community cohesion is good.

- The subject has been planned well to enable students to appreciate how their local community has developed over time. This includes visits to local places of historical interest, for example Kettering Museum.
- The pupils' awareness of life in a culturally diverse society is enhanced through the learning of topics on, for example, the development of the British Empire, the slave trade, and immigration. Pupils' global understanding is regularly enhanced through the study of relevant topics such as South Africa and the growth of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that specific targets are routinely identified in lesson planning for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, English as an additional language and those who are gifted historians, and that students' progress towards achieving these is regularly evaluated.

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

Champak Chauhan  
Her Majesty's Inspector