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Mr D Meikle
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Dear Mr Meikle

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 and 02 June 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 four lessons. More lessons could not be observed because some classes were involved in external visits and others were undertaking examinations.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement is good and their standards are well above average.

- Students make good progress in lessons and over time. Those in Year 7, for example, develop a good understanding of 'who are the British?' and develop an awareness of various invaders and settlers, including the Romans and the Vikings. In Year 10, students are developing well their understanding of the problems facing Germany after the First World War and the profound changes it experienced in the 1920s.
- At all ages, students are becoming competent historians. They work with a good range of primary and secondary sources. They can

evaluate these well and can give well reasoned arguments about why certain things happened in the past. For example Year 9 can give good reasons for the abolition of slavery in the 1830s. At A level, students have good understanding of particular issues, for example about Tsarist rule in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century and about the Swing disturbances in Norfolk and Suffolk in 1830 and 1831.

- Students are developing well their chronological understanding. Older students, for example, have a good appreciation of the developments in medicine over time. Higher attaining students write extensively and for different audiences and purposes.
- The department is a successful one within the school and recent examination results are well above average. In 2008, GCSE examinations results improved from 2007 and 82% gained grades A*-C, with 46.3% gaining a grade A* or A. These figures are considerably higher than national averages. The department is aware that girls perform noticeably better than boys and it is addressing this issue. At AS level, 95% passed in 2008, with a higher than average proportion attaining grades A and B. At A level in 2008, all students continued the recent trend in achieving a pass grade, with 67% gaining grades A or B. These results are well above national average.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. They are mature, responsible and settle down quickly for their lessons. They work well with each other and with the adults. They maintain their concentration on the tasks set. They are keen to participate in discussions and many are interested in the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons conscientiously and use a good variety of activities for teaching and learning. Students said how much they appreciated the breadth of activities offered.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and use their good subject knowledge well. They use incisive questioning to extend the students' knowledge and understanding. Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing the full range of students' historical skills.
- The activities set are challenging for the various abilities. Lessons are well paced, with explicit reminders about how much time is left for particular tasks.
- There is a good learning environment in lessons. Students respond well to the activities and they are keen to learn.
- Teachers are hard working and recognised as such by the students. As one said, 'They really care about what they do. They go the extra mile for us.'
- Marking is regularly undertaken. Comments are usually evaluative and they help the students to improve their work. The marking is linked well to the student's targets.
- Teachers use the interactive whiteboards regularly and competently, especially at the start of the lesson to introduce the topic to the class.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is generally good.

- The curriculum is broad, generally well balanced and it meets requirements. Planning for Key Stage 3 is being appropriately reviewed and there is a good rationale for the current Year 7. Planning for Years 8 and 9 is already being reviewed and changes will be made in due course. At Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, detailed schemes of work have been developed to reflect examination requirements.
- A particular strength of the curriculum is the rigorous development of a wide range of concepts and historical skills, including enquiry, evaluation, chronological understanding, and communicating about the past.
- Some students use and develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) through using the internet and by word processing their work. They report that they do this mainly at home using their own computers. The use of ICT within the department is underdeveloped.
- Students visit Castleton and Bakewell as part of improving their knowledge and understanding of local history. A few students also visit Japan, including Hiroshima, as part of the school's links with a Japanese school. However, visits to other places of interest are limited and the department does not have a routine programme of inviting visitors to talk about various aspects of history.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The curriculum leader for history has been in post only since September 2008, although he has been teaching at the school for several years. He has a good understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses through accurate self-evaluation.
- This self-evaluation is based on the gathering of a good range of evidence. Test and examination results are routinely analysed, lessons are regularly observed and evaluated, and the views of students on how to improve provision are sought. As a result, appropriate priorities have been identified and these are being implemented.
- The progress of students is comprehensively monitored through detailed marking and assessment procedures, and the setting of internal examinations. This information feeds into the whole-school system for tracking students' progress. Individual students in danger of underachieving are quickly identified and appropriate action taken. The students value this system.
- The curriculum leader is the only member of the department who teaches history full time. Other staff have other responsibilities in the school, or they teach part time. Managing the work of the department is, therefore, trickier than it would otherwise be. However, the curriculum leader manages the situation well.
- The department benefits from a good team ethos and this is recognised and appreciated by the students.

Subject issue: the promotion of independent learning

The promotion of students' independent learning is good.

- Students are regularly given a range of independent work, which they enjoy. They work on their own, or with their classmates, for sustained periods.
- Students are regularly offered opportunities to scrutinise and evaluate a wide range of evidence and to reach independent judgments about it. They do this well.
- Students regularly undertake in-depth studies as part of their homework. They have researched the lives of ancestors, interrogated websites, and conducted research from books and audio-visual materials. Some commented on how much they enjoy such activities.

Subject issue: the subject's contribution to community cohesion

The contribution of the department's approach to community cohesion is good.

- The department is developing a broad and relevant range of different units for study. Students are aware of their locality through an in-depth study of Bakewell. They also learn that both Bakewell and the United Kingdom are made up of a diverse range of people who have settled here over the centuries.
- Students' global understanding is enhanced through a study of such issues as slavery, the fight for civil rights in America, the Holocaust and about aspects of Japanese history. Students in Year 8 are also taught about Islam and the Crusades, and Mughal India. Issues of religious intolerance are addressed through studying the Gunpowder Plot and the life of Mary Tudor.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring there is an explicit and well-defined approach to developing students' skills in ICT in history lessons
- ensuring that students' experiences are enriched through a wider range of visits to places of historical interest, and that relevant visitors are regularly invited into school to talk to the 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 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