

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



22 March 2010

Ms E Skae
Principal
Walthamstow Academy
Billet Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 5DP

Dear Ms Skae

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 March 2010 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 contribution of history to community cohesion and the development of independent learning in history.

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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is inadequate.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is inadequate.

- Students enter the academy with standards of attainment which are well below average. Their standards in literacy are particularly low. While they make generally satisfactory progress in lessons and some students make good progress, not enough students make the good progress needed to close the gap in attainment by the time they complete their studies at the end of Key Stage 4. As a result, the proportion of students attaining grades A* to C in GCSE history is significantly below average. Although attainment is rising, it is not rising quickly enough to ensure that attainment is more closely aligned to the national average.

- While students make good progress in developing their subject-specific skills in Key Stage 4, their progress in developing their understanding of key historical concepts and processes is inadequate in Key Stage 3. This is because they are not given sufficiently regular and well-planned opportunities to develop these skills in lessons. As a result, the good progress seen in Key Stage 4 does not compensate for deficiencies seen in the lower years.
- Outcomes for students in the sixth form are satisfactory and students made good progress in their lesson on the impact of the non-cooperation movement in India in the 1920s.
- History makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development. Most students behave well in lessons and, when teaching is good, they enjoy their learning.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers' lesson planning is detailed and reflects their hard work and commitment. Teachers' good subject knowledge makes a significant contribution to the progress students make in Key Stages 4 and 5.
- Relationships between students and their teachers are generally good, resulting in a calm and orderly learning environment.
- While teaching is consistently good in Key Stages 4 and 5, too many lessons for younger students are only satisfactory.
- In the best lessons, clear success criteria are made available to students so that they know exactly what they need to do to make good progress in their learning. However, this good use of assessment is rarely seen at Key Stage 3. As a result, it is difficult for teachers and students to gauge how well they are doing.
- Students were seen to make the most progress when they were given good opportunities to be actively involved in their learning. However, in too many lessons, overly long teacher introductions and question and answer sessions result in students becoming too passive in their learning. In these lessons, all students have to work at the pace set by the teacher, regardless of their differing levels of ability.
- Marking is inconsistent. While some marking helps students to identify how they can improve, too much marking is cursory and does not provide sufficiently helpful targets for improvement, linked to clear assessment criteria. While teachers sometimes correct basic literacy errors, students are not required to make corrections. Marking is not yet having sufficient impact in raising students' standards in literacy.
- In Key Stage 3, students have limited opportunities to benefit from assessing their own and each other's work.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is inadequate.

- While the small proportions of students who choose to study history at GCSE and A level benefit from a coherent and well-crafted curriculum, the curriculum for younger students lacks satisfactory breadth and balance. This is particularly significant given that the large majority of students gain their only experience of secondary school history in Years 7 and 8. For these students, there are insufficient opportunities to study modern history. As a result, their understanding of the impact of more recent historical events in shaping today's world is extremely limited.
- There are currently only very limited opportunities to study local history. The programme of study for Years 7 and 8 does not give due attention to the movement and settlement of diverse communities over time to, from and within Britain. This is a significant omission given the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity within the school.
- The curriculum does not provide rigorous and well-planned opportunities for students to develop their subject-specific skills in the lower years. It has insufficient impact in tackling students' low levels of literacy, which are significant barriers to their learning in history.
- While older students reported that they enjoyed their visit to the Guardian newspaper newsroom, other opportunities to experience history outside the classroom are extremely limited. Students commonly reported that they would like more opportunities to participate in history visits to complement their lessons.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in history is inadequate.

- While self-evaluation is accurate, leadership and management arrangements have not yet had sufficient impact in raising students' achievement.
- Strategies to ensure that all teaching is good enough to accelerate students' progress in history are not sufficiently thorough or well embedded. As a result, the best practice in teaching and learning is not seen everywhere. Such shortfalls are particularly significant given that some history lessons are delivered by non subject specialists.
- Leaders and managers have not yet tackled the most pressing areas for improvement, for example, the need for detailed schemes of work at Key Stage 3. There is currently no common system of assessment. As a result, it is difficult for leaders and managers to have a clear view of students' progress in history.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- History is used to promote tolerance and understanding of diverse communities, for example, through the study of the history of Native American Indians and the impact of abuses of human rights, such as the

slave trade. Some students benefited from opportunities to conduct research into their own and other cultures during Black History Month.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is satisfactory.

- Students benefit from opportunities to develop their independent learning skills through research tasks set for homework. Year 8 students reported that they had enjoyed conducting research during Black History Month. Opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills are sometimes inhibited in lessons which are dominated too much by the teacher.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement for all groups of students in Key Stages 3 and 4 by:
 - strengthening the leadership and management of teaching and learning in history to ensure that lessons are consistently good in Key Stage 3
 - ensuring that the curriculum provides systematic and planned opportunities to develop students' levels of literacy and their subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills
 - developing assessment systems which enable staff and students to have a clear and accurate understanding of students' progress in history.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector