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Miss A Woodhouse  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Woodhouse

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: history**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 5 and 6 October 2010 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Students make good progress by the end of Key Stage 4 with the result that standards of attainment have risen to be above average. Provisional GCSE history results for 2010 indicate a significant improvement on previous years with higher proportions of students attaining A\* to C grades in GCSE history than before. High attainers make particularly good progress and 37% of the students achieved A\* to A grades. Some lower and middle ability boys make less progress than other groups. Strategies to improve their skills in extended writing have not yet had their full impact.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form consistently and some students make outstanding progress.

- Students work well in lessons and make good gains in their knowledge and understanding, particularly in GCSE and A-level classes. However, achievement in Key Stage 3 is less consistent because some lessons secure only satisfactory progress. In these lessons, the pace of learning is too slow, and learning activities do not fully challenge and inspire all groups of learners. Occasionally, this results in a small minority of students losing focus.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students recognise the value of history in developing their understanding of the contemporary world and can articulate very clearly how it helps to improve their analytical and evaluative skills. Students in Key Stages 4 and 5 exhibit high levels of motivation and commitment to the subject.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- The large majority of teaching secures good and sometimes outstanding progress. Lessons benefit from careful planning, informed by teachers' excellent subject knowledge, particularly in the examination classes.
- Students are well informed about their personal targets and, as a result of consistently good-quality marking, have a good understanding of how to improve. In the best practice seen, students are given opportunities to respond to their teachers' written comments to create a highly productive learning dialogue.
- In some lessons, teachers do not use assessment information sufficiently to ensure learning activities fully meet the needs of all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teaching does not yet consistently exploit opportunities to develop students' skills as independent learners. While a good range of activities are regularly provided in lessons, students are not yet empowered sufficiently to develop their skills as historical enquirers, through speculating, taking risks and formulating and testing their own hypotheses.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides a good balance of courses for students who choose to pursue history through GCSE and into the sixth form. Students report that they enjoy opportunities to study English medieval history at advanced level, particularly as this contrasts so well with the modern world history they study at GCSE.
- The school has adopted an innovative approach to the curriculum in Year 7, through an integrated humanities course, 'the project', which has been designed, in part, to help develop students' personal, learning and thinking skills. The course provides good opportunities for students to develop their

political literacy, although topics such as 'democracy' and 'parliament' are not always rooted in their historical context. Students report that they enjoy the extended opportunities to study some historical topics in depth through, for example, 'Battle of Hastings Day'.

- However, taken together, the Key Stage 3 curriculum does not offer sufficient range and depth. Students are not given enough opportunities to develop their understanding of change and continuity across and within periods. In addition, the curriculum has not been adapted well enough in the light of increased pressure on available teaching time to ensure that the historical content is sufficiently broad and wide-ranging.
- Leaders and managers have started formulating systems to plan for progression in key concepts and processes at Key Stage 3, although, these plans are at an early stage. This is a key priority to ensure that teaching, learning and rates of progress in Years 7 to 9 match, more consistently, the good provision and outcomes seen in the older year groups.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

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

- Recent changes to leadership and management arrangements have already had a clear impact in raising achievement in Key Stage 4.
- The subject leader for history is highly reflective and keen to constantly improve the quality of provision in history. He is supported well through excellent line management procedures which have helped him grow into the role extremely well.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of the department's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Monitoring procedures are effective in identifying features of the best practice and where provision can be improved. For example, the department recognises the need to revise curriculum provision at Key Stage 3 and to share the best practice in teaching, more widely, across the department.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- strengthening provision at Key Stage 3 by ensuring that:
  - the curriculum offers sufficient range and depth
  - the pace of planning for progression in the development of students' knowledge, understanding and historical skills is accelerated
- sharing the best practice in teaching and learning so that all students make consistently good progress in lessons
- developing opportunities to strengthen students' skills as independent enquirers.

I hope that 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 may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Daniel Burton**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**