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Mr C Stone
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Stone

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 15 and 16 November 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.

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

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Results in the GCSE examinations have been significantly above the national average in recent years. The proportion of students attaining grades A* to A rose markedly from 26% in 2009 to 49% in 2010. Overall, girls perform better than boys. At AS and A level, students attain well.
- Students' learning and progress in lessons are usually outstanding and they make excellent progress over time.
- Students are developing key concepts extremely well. They have excellent understanding of change and continuity and cause and consequence through their study of, for example, medicine through time. Students develop their chronological understanding well from Year 7.

- Students discuss historical issues in a mature manner and can competently interpret and evaluate historical evidence. In Year 11, for example, they have excellent understanding of the impact of Europeans on the lives and culture of the Plains Indians in North America.
- At all ages and ability levels, students write at length and for different audiences and purposes. Students enjoy learning history and are highly enthusiastic about it. About half the students choose to study history at GCSE, considerably more than the national average.
- Students work well with each other and with adults, and lessons are characterised by excellent relationships. Students maintain their concentration on the tasks set and they work hard for long periods.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers create an excellent learning environment based on realistically high expectations of all abilities. Students respond well to this and there is mutual respect by staff and students. They appreciate the high quality of teaching that is tailored for them.
- Lesson planning is thorough and takes into account the needs of all abilities. There is an in-depth focus on learning, using a comprehensive range of historical resources.
- Teachers set work which is highly challenging to all abilities. This is supported by skilful questioning and the constant monitoring of students' progress.
- Students with particular needs, including the gifted, are identified and specific targets are set for them. Support staff work well with students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they use well to extend students' knowledge and understanding. They pose incisive questions in class and offer excellent feedback to the class and to individuals. The learning is exceptionally well paced because time is used efficiently. Students are set explicit deadlines and these are adhered to.
- The teachers offer outstanding feedback to students. There is excellent oral feedback in lessons and activities are adapted if necessary. This is supplemented by in-depth written comments in the students' work and the setting of routine targets for improvement. Students value these comments. The assessment by the teachers is supported well by regular peer assessment among the students.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The school has a two-year curriculum for Key Stage 3 which gives students an excellent grounding in history. Requirements are met and

students are given excellent opportunities to study different times and different places in time.

- In Year 9, they are offered outstanding experiences in history and there is rapid development of their history skills. They do this through the study of particular historical mysteries which the students find highly enjoyable, for example the sinking of the Titanic, Jack the Ripper and whether the film 'Braveheart' is based on true events. Such an imaginative approach leads to the use and interpretation of a wide range of historical evidence.
- This approach is carried on at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form where students develop into highly able historians. Their knowledge of the topics studied is often at a sophisticated level and they can confidently articulate how their subject-specific skills are developing.
- Students' learning is greatly enriched by visits to a wide range of historical places, such as Kenilworth and Tamworth castles, the battlefields in Belgium, and Berlin.
- There is good emphasis on promoting literacy and numeracy skills in history. Skills in information and communication technology (ICT), however, are relatively underdeveloped.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- The subject leader and the head of the humanities faculty have established a strong sense of purpose and direction for the subject. They have created a department with high aspirations, outstanding provision and high outcomes.
- The relatively new subject leader has established himself quickly and he knows the strengths and weaknesses of the department well. This is based on rigorous self-evaluation. Lessons are observed regularly by the senior and middle leaders, peer observation is undertaken by the staff to share good practice, and students' progress is comprehensively monitored and appropriate action taken to improve this when necessary. Relevant priorities for improvement have been identified in the subject development plan.
- Teachers work hard, morale is high and there is a strong team spirit within the department. There is a tangible drive to succeed and outcomes for students have improved rapidly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the use of ICT in history and ensuring that students develop the full range of such skills.

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 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
Additional Inspector