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Mr M Liddicoat  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Liddicoat

### **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 1 and 2 February 2011 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; attendance at a Year 9 Options Assembly; and observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Students make good progress at all key stages. Nevertheless, the school recognises that not enough students gain the highest grades at GCSE and at A level.
- At Key Stage 3, attainment is above average. Some students produce an extremely high standard of written work as seen, for example, in the responses of Year 7 students to the assessment questions they were set on Roman civilisation.
- In recent years, results have fluctuated at GCSE. However, current students are making good progress and results in external modular examinations indicate that the proportion of students gaining grades A\* or A and grades A\* to C is likely to increase in 2011.
- The attainment profile of students entering A-level studies is lower than is typical of sixth-form students nationally. Those in Year 12 find the

transition from GCSE to AS challenging. However, although attainment is average, by the end of Year 13, results show that students make good progress.

- Students across the year groups develop a good knowledge and understanding of topics studied. They investigate sources confidently and assess the value of historical evidence well. They are also developing a good understanding of different historical interpretations.
- Students articulate their ideas with assurance and can make connections between topics studied in different historical periods. They understand the advantages of studying history and can explain why the subject is important in their academic and personal development. In the words of one Year 11 student, 'studying the past helps us to appreciate the present'.
- History makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. It is a popular option at GCSE and in the sixth form. Currently, two in every three students study history at Key Stage 4. Students have excellent attitudes to learning, behave well in lessons and work well together and on their own.

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

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, high expectations and a clear understanding of examination requirements.
- Lessons are well-organised and students know what is expected of them. Teachers employ a variety of approaches which contribute to students' engagement and enjoyment. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support learning. Learning is enhanced by teachers' skilful use of questioning which ensures that, when probed, students respond with thoughtful and relevant ideas.
- Students taking examination courses feel well supported and appreciate the advice and guidance given by teachers.
- Although lessons have pace, teachers are sometimes too keen to pass on their knowledge to students and do not give them sufficient time in which to work things out for themselves. As a result, opportunities for students to reflect on what they are learning are missed and students become too reliant on the teacher.
- The needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are considered but those of higher-attaining students are not fully met. This is because the level of challenge in lessons is limited and teachers do not routinely plan to provide appropriate tasks for these students.
- Marking is helpful and provides students with guidance. However, particularly at Key Stage 3, comments are sometimes too generic and subject-specific advice is missing.

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

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad, balanced and meets statutory requirements. Schemes of work are currently being revised to focus on key themes.
- Students enjoy the specifications recently introduced at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They like the mix of medieval and modern topics covered at A level and enjoy making connections between their courses and events today. As they point out, this helps to make history relevant.
- Cross-curricular links are developing well, particularly with English, ICT and drama.
- Learning outside the classroom is strong and the department is committed to introducing additional enrichment opportunities for students. Year 9 students enthused about their trip to the battlefields of the First World War, as did Year 11 students about their four-day fieldwork visit to the castles of Wales. Although sixth-form students will have the opportunity to listen to leading historians at a conference on Russian history, links with local universities are undeveloped, and the department has not yet exploited opportunities for inviting visitors into school.

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

Leadership and management in history are good.

- The head of department is establishing a strong sense of purpose and direction for the subject. Staff have high aspirations for their students and are committed to making history accessible to all students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. However, overall progress to improve provision and outcomes is hampered by the absence of any structured action plan which sets down precise actions together with timescales, milestones, costs, responsibilities, and monitoring and evaluation criteria.
- Teachers cooperate well and readily share good practice. This is of particular benefit to the non-specialist teachers of history who are well supported. Teachers are reflective and keen to improve their practice. Their passion for the subject is obvious and is recognised by students.

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

- developing assessment practice, particularly feedback, to ensure that students are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- ensuring that the needs of more able history students are met more effectively
- strengthening leadership and management by formulating more comprehensive plans for improvement which can be properly monitored and evaluated.

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

**Michael Maddison**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**