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Miss J Venn
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Dear Miss Venn

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 7 and 8 December 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons or part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Attainment is variable but is improving over time and is currently broadly average by the end of Year 11. This represents satisfactory progress from students' starting points on entry to Year 7. The 2010 GCSE results demonstrated that increasing numbers of students are reaching the higher grades of A and A*.
- Students in Key Stage 3 are aware of key historical concepts, such as anachronism and bias, and have sound chronological skills. In Years 10 and 11, students provide accurate information on the variety of sources used by historians to make their judgements and they give reasons why both primary and secondary evidence cannot always be trusted. Their

perception of the value of the study of history in their everyday lives is less well developed.

- Students' personal development and their engagement in lessons are good and sometimes outstanding. They enjoy history, have a high regard for their teachers, and are opting for the subject in increasing numbers at the end of Year 9.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge but the level of challenge in lessons is inconsistent. In good lessons, a Year 10 session on the Versailles Treaty, for example, students were motivated to succeed by assignments which required them to think more deeply about the subject matter. On occasions, however, there is too much teacher direction and students are not encouraged to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning and progress. Teachers generally use the electronic whiteboard effectively as a teaching and learning tool.
- Assessment is satisfactory. The department has introduced controlled assessment tasks into Key Stage 4 and there are common end-of-unit assignments in Key Stage 3 for which students receive National Curriculum Levels. Ongoing assessment, however, does not always inform teachers rapidly enough when students are in danger of underachievement and when extra support is needed.
- Marking is regular but inconsistent in quality, particularly in relation to the comments that students receive on how they can improve their work. As a result, although most students are aware of their targets, they are not always sure of what they need to do to reach them.
- Teachers care for their students and one-to-one support in lessons is impressive. Students are grateful for this support and, as a consequence, relationships between students and the staff who work with them are good.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers are beginning to modify the curriculum in Key Stage 3 and students' acquisition of historical skills is emphasised from Year 7, through the 'Soldier Project' for example.
- A new GCSE scheme has been introduced in order to meet the interests of students more closely. Students enjoy their Modern World studies and find the revision booklets produced by teachers a valuable resource for their learning.
- There is a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities and the department organises history trips for each year group. The Belgian

Battlefields excursion, including a visit to the Menin Gate ceremony and the Sanctuary Wood trench system, is a most popular event and students have produced two DVDs highlighting their experiences.

- The curriculum does not provide sufficient opportunities to develop students' skills in literacy, in relation to their understanding and use of discrete historical terminology, the language of examination questions and how to prepare for written assignments.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- The subject coordinator has a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of the subject, but has not ensured that there is a clear vision for how provision should develop. As a result, there are inconsistencies in progress and attainment across classes, in the quality and extent of marking and in the challenge for students to enable them to reach higher standards.
- The departmental handbook is detailed but a significant amount of the information is generic. Schemes of work are fully in place and comprise convincing information on how topics may be approached. However, there is little evidence to suggest that delivery is evaluated well enough to inform future planning.
- The school's specialism has a satisfactory impact on the work of the history department, particularly in relation to the provision of new technology. However, the subject coordinator recognises that the curriculum needs to be developed further in order to reflect the industrial heritage of the local community and in order that the department can derive maximum benefit from engineering status.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- eradicating inconsistencies in the challenge for students and providing them with more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and progress
- developing the use of assessment and marking to identify more rapidly when students are underachieving and to provide them with more consistent feedback on what they need to do to improve their work
- placing more emphasis on developing students' skills in literacy so that they are more aware of and can use relevant historical terminology, can understand the language of examination questions and can approach their written assignments with confidence
- further developing a clear vision for how the department should move forward.

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

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector