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Mrs N Aboud
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Aboud

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 6 and 7 December 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Over the past three years, standards have been well below the national average. In this year's GCSE examinations which were taken by only 14 students, just over 14% of the students achieved grades A* to C compared with a national average of 67%. However, as a result of very positive intervention by management, standards are now increasingly close to average and students are making satisfactory progress.
- Some GCSE students' written work shows good progress given their weak starting points in September. This is a significant accomplishment given the short time between the start of the autumn term and the date of the inspection.
- Students' personal development is good. Students interviewed drew a sharp distinction between their development last year and development

since September 2010. Their better understanding of the subject and the way it is taught has helped them grow in confidence. They can also speak about the personal implications for them of issues deriving from the study of such topics as the First World War and the Peasants' Revolt. In the lessons attended, students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning were outstanding.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- In a very short space of time, pupils' progress has been lifted from a very low starting point. This is because teaching is good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are keen to share their enthusiasm with students. Their willingness to give extra help at break or after school was appreciated by students. From inspection of GCSE students' exercise books, it is clear that lessons are planned and delivered well and well-suited to students' needs.
- Work is assessed regularly and teachers' comments are helpful. Students' performance is now monitored carefully by tests and a tracking record which inform teaching. The setting arrangements work very well.
- Students self-assess each other's work in addition to teachers' assessments. The self-assessment is useful to students in developing their understanding. They have targets but their understanding of what they have to do to improve varies considerably between students in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, students are very clear.
- Although teaching is good, there is room to improve opportunities for students to ask their own questions, undertake research and find answers. Additionally, in a few instances, the fast pace of lessons, combined with the lack of clear links in the content covered, mean that students' understanding is not always secure.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- There is a clear rationale for the Key Stage 3 curriculum based predominantly on chronology. Due emphasis is given to the development of knowledge, concepts and skills. Knowledge tends to predominate in Key Stage 3 because of students' identified needs. However, by the time students start GCSE, the full spectrum of concepts and skills is covered successfully.
- The main weakness of the Key Stage 3 curriculum is the extent to which it does not explain to students how the past influences the present. It does explain to some extent as in the lesson seen which compared government today with that of medieval times; but the department realises that it can go further in taking up the opportunities offered by the National Curriculum.

- There have been and continue to be no visits to sites of historical interest and there have been no visitors to the school to talk about the past. However, some are planned for the future. The absence of primary and secondary resources to support learning was a feature of the lessons seen.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- Because of its previous inadequacies, the subject's senior managers have worked hard very quickly to develop an overall strategy to raise standards and provide an effective education for students. This strategy has then been developed successfully by the acting head of department.
- Senior managers and the acting head of department have a very good understanding of the strengths and weakness of all aspects of history provision and this is reflected in their good development plan.
- A significant feature has been the link that management has made with the history department at Howard of Effingham School. Working in partnership with this school has been very significant in securing improvement.
- There is strong capacity to improve not least because the results of the work that has been undertaken are beginning to show in terms of improved students' progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that Key Stage 3 students have meaningful targets so that they have a clear understanding of how to improve
- giving students more opportunity to ask their own questions, undertake research and find answers
- making the pace and content of lessons more sensitive to what is required to develop students' understanding
- providing students with the opportunity to visit sites of historical interest, to meet people who can talk about the past, and to have more access to good-quality primary and secondary sources.

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

Paul Armitage
Additional Inspector