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Mr R Page
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Page

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 7 and 8 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Attainment is high throughout the school and students of all abilities and groups make excellent progress in developing their historical skills and understanding. Students undertake a wide range of engaging and stimulating activities both inside and outside the classroom, such as finding out how people lived in High Wycombe and Buckinghamshire at different times in the past. Students in the sixth form enjoy debating the implications of the battle of Hastings. The focus on instilling excellent literacy skills from Year 7 means that by the end of Key Stage 4 students write fluently. In the sixth form, students regularly do very well in national essay writing competitions.
- All teachers encourage students to reflect carefully before answering questions, and they allow 'thinking time' when necessary. Throughout the

school students learn to deepen and hone their skills of source analysis and interpretation.

- Students' personal development is outstanding in history. Students said that history is 'very enjoyable because teachers make it interactive and challenging, especially in debates and writing essays'. Younger students said that they enjoy being allowed to organise their ideas without too much teacher structuring but valued this when topics were difficult. Students like learning about the past to compare it with the present. They are able to talk knowledgeably and well about their favourite events and people.
- Behaviour is impeccable in lessons and students learn well both collaboratively and on their own. They demonstrate a keen desire to know as much about their history as they can and for the sixth form this extends to book reading challenges for out of school learning.
- Students are encouraged to present their findings clearly to the rest of their group and then the whole class. They do this extremely well and with confidence. Students have an excellent understanding of the importance of basing their ideas on evidence and how evidence may also be seen in different ways to provide alternative arguments and perspectives.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers develop excellent relationships with students. Lessons are planned meticulously to ensure that the activities engage all students. Lessons are based on clear learning objectives and expectations which are communicated regularly to students so that there is little misunderstanding of what is expected of them. There is a constant challenge for students to achieve their best in lessons.
- In lessons, teachers constantly make suggestions to students on how they might shape their work and this allows them to make excellent progress. Marking in students' books is excellent because all comments help students to see how to improve their work.
- Teachers track and record the progress of individual pupils in their development of historical skills well. During Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, this support is excellent. However, the head of department is aware that the rich assessment information which is available could be better used to ensure that support for students at risk of underachieving at GCSE is tailored appropriately enough and focused more specifically on tackling their key areas of weakness.
- The use of information and communication technology to develop pupils' understanding of topics and enhance their presentations to the class is excellent. It is especially so in the sixth form, where the department has created a virtual learning site so that materials and study programmes can be accessed by students at any time, as well as being used most effectively in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The school has developed a Key Stage 3 curriculum that matches students' needs extremely well. It is well thought out and linked very carefully to regular assessments.
- The emphasis on developing students' historical knowledge and understanding is excellent. These aspects are strengthened in other subjects when the focus is on a history topic, for example visiting the battlefields of the First World War with the language department. The head of department has specifically focused on how links between subjects help to develop students' deepening 'sense of history'.
- The school organises an excellent range of visits to places of historical interest locally as well as nationally and abroad. Students say they enjoy these very much.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The head of department is relatively new to leadership, but uses his longer experience of the school extremely well to generate an excellent team spirit and ethos. He has an excellent grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of history, which the accurate and well-constructed departmental self-evaluation demonstrates very clearly. The subject is monitored very well and departmental minutes indicate clearly how teachers are keen to share their ideas with each other and explore new initiatives positively. There is constant drive to improve teaching approaches and teaching programmes.
- Monitoring of teaching is good and is supported by regular work reviews and discussions with students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that support for students who are at risk of underachieving at GCSE is focused more specifically on tackling their key areas of weakness.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector