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Dr J Hunt
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Dear Dr Hunt

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 28 and 29 September 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 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 good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Students make good progress at all ages and attain standards at age 16 that are above average. Numbers of students achieving A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations in the last two years have been above national averages. However, the proportion gaining A* and A grades is in line with this average.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress and attain well. For the last three years all students at AS and A level passed, with a significant minority achieving the higher grades A and B.
- In lessons and over time, students make good progress. Students in Year 7 are developing their investigative skills well through the study of Tollund Man, while those in Year 9 are developing their knowledge and

understanding of the causes of the First World War and why men enlisted to fight.

- Students are enhancing their historical skills well. They can work with a good range of primary and secondary sources and can competently evaluate these.
- Students are interested in the subject. Their behaviour is often exemplary and they are well motivated. They settle down quickly to their learning, maintain their concentration, and work well with each other and with the adults.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are characterised by a good learning environment based on good relationships. Teachers plan a good range of activities for the different abilities of the students. This includes whole-class teaching, individual learning and work in small groups which enables students to maintain their interest in the tasks set.
- The activities set are challenging for most students who find the work interesting and make good progress. However, the needs of the more able students are not being systematically met, especially those who could gain the highest grades in their GCSE examinations.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this well to extend the students' understanding, for example through incisive questioning.
- Time is usually used efficiently and the activities are briskly paced. There is a regular reminder of how much time is left for particular activities, adding a sense of urgency for the students.
- Oral feedback to the students is good. This is complemented by the regular marking of students' work, with constructive comments on how to improve. The students find these comments very helpful. Students' progress is regularly monitored through a target-setting process. This process has recently been reviewed and it is being strengthened by the school to make it more effective.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- At Key Stage 3, students are taught a good range of study units and current requirements are met. The appropriate study of local history, for example about life in Diss at the start of the twentieth century, is complemented by the study of the Norman invasion of England, the French Revolution and the start of the First World War. At Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, the department has developed detailed schemes of work to support examination requirements. Students are made aware of these requirements.

- At all ages, students say they enjoy learning history because of the experiences offered to them. They are taught a broad and relevant range of study units, which are made more interesting through the good use of information and communication technology for independent research. The enhancement of students' literacy skills is an integral part of the teaching and learning.
- Students' learning is enriched by visits to a good range of historical places. In addition to local history, visits are regularly made to the First World War battlefields in Belgium, to the National Archives, the Imperial War Museum, and the Black Country Museum. The students value these stimulating experiences because it enhances their interest and achievement in the subject.
- A significantly high proportion of students compared with the national picture choose to study history at GCSE. In the current Year 10, 100 out of 175 students have opted for the subject.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- Members of staff work hard, plan their lessons well and there is good team spirit within the department.
- The subject leader has ensured that the subject keeps pace with national developments and has instigated appropriate changes, for example regarding Key Stage 3. Relevant questions are also being asked about how best to meet the needs of lower attaining students studying history at Key Stage 4.
- The department functions well on a day-to-day basis and outcomes for students are good. However, there are some important strategic weaknesses. The subject leader monitors teaching and learning but this is limited largely to the requirements for performance management. There is a sound understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the department but procedures for quality assurance are not comprehensive enough. Students, for example, are not routinely asked about their experiences in learning history, their work is not scrutinised sufficiently regularly to gain an overview, and the range of lessons observed is not broad enough.
- The department has a three-year development plan and this is supported by an annual plan. However, these plans are basic and will not drive forward continuous improvement. They lack precise timescales, milestones, costs, and monitoring and evaluation criteria. The provision to meet professional development needs is reasonable but an overarching plan about how these needs will best be met does not exist.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that procedures for monitoring, evaluating and improving provision in the subject are rapidly strengthened

- formulating a more comprehensive plan for improvement which can be properly monitored and evaluated
 - ensuring that professional development needs are more comprehensively addressed
- ensuring that more students attain A* and A grades, particularly in their GCSE examinations, by regularly setting more appropriate work for them, including more in-depth research to extend their knowledge, understanding and 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 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

Champak Chauhan
Additional Inspector