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Mr P Kelly
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kelly

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 22 and 23 November 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is inadequate.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Students' learning and progress are satisfactory and they attain standards that are broadly in line with the average. Results at GCSE in recent years have fluctuated. In 2008, 57% of students gained grades A* to C, which increased to 75% in 2009, well above average, and then fell substantially in 2010 to 61%. The results in 2010 were significantly below the levels that the school was expecting through its target-setting process. The proportion of students attaining the higher grades A* to A was considerably below the national average in 2009 and is well below the average in 2010.
- Students make sound progress and those in Year 8, for example, are developing good understanding of why Henry VIII dissolved the

monasteries. At all ages, students are evaluating historical sources competently. They use primary and secondary sources well and can ask pertinent questions about them. At Key Stage 3, however, students' understanding of key concepts, for example cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, or cause and consequence, is limited.

- Students enjoy learning history. They work hard in lessons and their attitudes are excellent. They work well in pairs, in groups and with adults. History is a popular subject and about 100 out of 250 students opt to study the subject in Year 10.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory with good features.

- Lessons are generally planned well and focus on key historical questions. Learning objectives are identified and shared routinely with the students. Lessons are characterised by good relationships.
- Teachers manage the activities well and students respond well to these. Teachers use their good subject knowledge in questioning to extend students' understanding.
- Time in lessons is usually used efficiently, with a good pace to the learning in a few lessons. The level of challenge is usually appropriate for the various abilities.
- However, the generic planning for different classes in the same year group is not always adapted to the needs of each class. Sometimes, the range of activities for the various abilities is narrow. Targets for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or for those who are gifted and talented are not always identified.
- Teachers' marking and assessment procedures are improving. Teachers regularly offer good oral feedback to the students. This is complemented by detailed marking, the use of evaluative comments, and the identification of targets for improvement. All of these are valued by the students. The department has recently introduced formal assessments in Key Stage 3 to identify strengths and weaknesses of the students. This work is developing slowly and there is not yet a baseline assessment for students in Year 7.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is inadequate.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 has not been properly planned for in recent years. It lacks balance, breadth, coherence and a clear rationale. The opportunities presented by the national revision at Key Stage 3 have not been grasped fully. Legal requirements are only just met. There are not enough thematic studies and very little local history is covered. Not enough is being taught about the development of trade, colonisation, industrialisation, technology and the growth of the British Empire. The

brief schemes of work are basic and do not identify appropriate assessment procedures.

- The department adopted a new GCSE syllabus in 2007 which covers modern world history. It undertook this change as a means of making history more relevant and to promote students' achievement. The results in 2010 indicate that it has not been successful in the latter.
- The opportunities for enrichment activities for students are inadequate. Although older students in Key Stage 4 undertake a few historical visits, for example to Washington USA, these are few and far between. Younger students have not been on a history visit in recent years. A few external visitors come into school to talk about aspects of history but this is limited. There is no history club within the school and a few students expressed a desire to establish one.
- The curriculum does not adequately enhance students' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and it does not promote creativity. The department has not fully embraced the opportunities offered by the school's specialist status in business and enterprise.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The department is not well led or managed. It does not have a long-term strategic view of how it is going to improve provision and outcomes within the subject.
- The department has a three-year plan for the period 2010 to 2013. However, some of the timescales lack sufficient urgency for implementation. For example, the development of cross-curricular skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT has been identified but the completion date for this is too leisurely.
- The department's self-evaluation is over-optimistic about its own performance and does not sufficiently identify weaknesses and how to tackle them. Some monitoring and evaluation procedures are undertaken, including a periodic scrutiny of students' work and the observation of a few lessons. These procedures, however, have not led to any significant improvements for the students.
- The department functions adequately on a day-to-day basis but key leadership and management tasks have not been properly undertaken. These include the planning and implementing of a broad and relevant curriculum at Key Stage 3, incorporating ICT within the teaching and learning, and expanding the range of enrichment activities. In addition, there has not been enough professional development of the teachers in recent years.
- You and other senior leaders are aware of the shortcomings of the department and are taking appropriate action to help the subject leader to tackle the weaknesses. However, urgent action needs to be taken to improve provision and outcomes for the students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving leadership and management of the subject by ensuring that:
 - the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is better planned and developed, with more detailed and more appropriate schemes of work
 - the quality of teaching is improved so that much more is good or better
 - the needs of higher attaining students and those with special educational needs are better met
 - the use of ICT is firmly embedded within the teaching and learning
 - students are offered a broader range of enrichment experiences
 - assessment procedures are improved at a more rapid pace
 - the professional development of all staff is enhanced.

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 under the unique reference number for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Champak Chauhan
Additional Inspector