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28 January 2011

Mr B Scott
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Scott

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 17 and 18 January 2011 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Students' attainment is above average by the end of Year 11. The majority of students make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. However, the needs of more able students are not met fully and more of them could gain the highest grades.
- In the sixth form, students attain broadly average results, but this represents good progress for the majority of them.
- In lessons, students make good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. They receive excellent support in preparing for examinations and to meet their targets.
- Students demonstrate good attitudes to learning and work well with each other as well as on their own. They can discuss their individual targets

confidently and know what they need to do to meet them. Students behave extremely well in lessons.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- The department uses a range of approaches very effectively to help improve teaching. These include sharing lesson objectives at the beginning of lessons and providing stimulating tasks to promote debates and discussions. Students said that they valued the many opportunities to discuss important issues, such as the causes of wars. They also said that they very much enjoyed the way that teachers made tasks practical, so that they were engaged fully throughout the lessons. Students also valued the support that they received from teachers to help them make good progress.
- Teachers use their history knowledge well to generate thoughtful responses from students. Teachers allow students plenty of time to respond to questions, and students said that they welcomed this 'thinking time' because some answers were difficult to communicate in history.
- Students' progress is monitored through an exceptionally well-planned sequence of assessment tasks. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) extremely well to boost students' progress. However, they do not yet track students' progress in key thinking and history skills in Key Stage 3 as well as they do in Key Stage 4.
- Marking in books is exemplary and all students know exactly what they need to do to meet their targets.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The school offers a wide range of courses to meet students' different needs, supplemented by visits to sites of historical importance. Although the revised Year 7 'Global Learning' curriculum provides a good introduction to skills work, opportunities are limited in Year 8 to consolidate this. The plans for a revised Year 8 curriculum would resolve this well.
- The schemes of work for each year group are clear and detailed and provide a good indication of how learning is to be developed. Guidance is good on effective teaching approaches for stretching the more able history students, but opportunities are sometimes missed to extend the challenge for this group effectively.
- Students benefit from excellent support, including a good revision programme in Year 11 to help them to prepare for examinations.
- The curriculum in the sixth form meets the needs of students well. Those students who were interviewed said that they enjoyed their study topics which made them think hard about the issues facing the modern world and their own perspectives on life today.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management in history are outstanding.

- The department is led and managed very well. All teachers have a history background and are well qualified and very interested in the topics they teach. The team works together extremely well and has established good relationships with students. This helps to explain why the subject is very popular in the school.
- Science specialist status has played a good part in helping the department to focus on embedding innovations and new approaches to teaching and learning, especially through the use of ICT.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and very wide-ranging. The improvement plan is based securely on the results of monitoring and analysis by the head of department and linked senior leaders. The department has an excellent capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- tracking more explicitly students' progress in developing historical concepts and skills in Key Stage 3
- ensuring that more able students are challenged to make even better progress, both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

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