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8 March 2011

Mr K Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jones

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 16 and 17 February 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.

- Attainment is broadly average and all groups of students make good progress. Students have a good introduction to historical thinking in Year 7 and are constantly challenged to reflect carefully about how to link facts together and generate explanations using evidence. By Year 9, students are able to offer their own interpretations confidently.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They behave well and enjoy their lessons, especially when they are creatively engaged in practical thinking exercises. They work well in small groups and present their findings to the whole class clearly and confidently.

- Students are given a good range of opportunities to plan their own work and carry it out themselves. In lessons, students are often given tasks where they have to take responsibility for organising their group work and how best to present it to the rest of the class.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers use their enthusiasm and expertise well to plan lesson activities which promote students' enjoyment of history and develop their historical knowledge through each key stage.
- Teachers employ a good range of approaches to encourage students to think carefully about their work and how best to present it to others. Students have good opportunities to debate, discuss and challenge each other on their history tasks.
- Teachers make satisfactory use of information and communication technology to improve students' learning.
- Marking and assessment are satisfactory. However, the tracking of students' progress lacks sufficient rigour for teachers to identify how well students make progress in specific skills over time. Similarly, opportunities are missed in books to make clear how well students are progressing towards their summative targets.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- Planning has been good for implementing the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Planning for progression in skills, themes and some aspects of historical concepts is not yet clear enough. Links are good with other subjects, especially those associated with the school's arts specialism such as art and drama, and English.
- Schemes of work are clear and indicate how key questions are to be addressed by students. There is clear guidance on how students with special education needs and/or disabilities are to be appropriately engaged in lessons.
- History attracts a growing number of students at GCSE and the subject is now well established in the school's small sixth form. Students spoke well about their Key Stage 4 and sixth-form studies.
- The department has ensured that students have a good range of trips to supplement their class work. Local history has a good focus and students spoke enthusiastically about their trips to Windsor, Slough railway station and local regimental museums. The sixth form makes a very productive visit to the National Archives at Kew.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management in history are good.

- Effective leadership and management over the last three years have ensured that students now make good progress. Departmental self-evaluation is accurate and is constantly reviewed.
- The departmental action plan is appropriately detailed and sets out clearly how improvements are to be made and when changes are to be reviewed.
- The department meets regularly, both formally and informally, to share ideas and to moderate students' work. Teachers have generated a good team spirit.
- The processes for monitoring the work of the department are good and lesson plans are reviewed regularly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the tracking of students' progress in historical skills and concepts is more rigorous so that it is much clearer how students can best be supported to improve their work at a faster pace
- ensuring that marking in books shows more clearly how well students are making progress towards their target grades.

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