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8 April 2011

Mrs A Webb
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Dear Mrs Webb

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 29 and 30 March 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, including two joint observations with a senior member of staff.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Achievement is good across all key stages. Results in national tests are generally above average and the quality of learning and progress is good in lessons and over time.
- In the large majority of lessons observed, students made good gains in developing their knowledge and understanding.
- Students are becoming increasingly adept at evaluating a range of sources to develop well-reasoned arguments. For example, Year 11 students are able to confidently examine an interpretation of evacuation in the Second World War through the critical use of a set of historical sources.
- Students benefit from opportunities to develop a good understanding of significance when judging the relative importance of a range of factors relating to an historical enquiry. For example, Year 12 students worked

together well to construct a sophisticated understanding of the reasons for and the extent and depth of religious change in England under Mary I.

- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They demonstrate real enthusiasm for history and increasing numbers are choosing to study history at GCSE. When given the opportunity, students are inquisitive and enjoy planning their own learning. They collaborate well in pairs and small group discussions.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Good subject knowledge is used to plan learning activities which engage students well. Students are given good opportunities to be partners in the learning process and encouraged to steer learning by developing ideas of their own or by learning independently. In less effective lessons, such opportunities are constrained by overly directed teaching and insufficient time for reflection.
- Teachers plan their lessons well to meet the needs of all students and establish a clear focus on learning objectives and learning outcomes. Students say how much they value the increasingly sophisticated use of new technologies to support learning and promote achievement.
- Where teaching is at its best, lessons are fast paced and underpinned by carefully constructed and challenging enquiry questions. A good variety of activities in lessons and probing questioning is used to gauge and deepen students' understanding and promotes their enjoyment.
- Marking and assessment are good though some variability exists within the department. The best practice is seen in the upper school, where precise subject-specific marking and dialogue clearly convey the next learning steps. However, opportunities are missed to capitalise on the students' significant potential to develop their own learning through the use of teachers' comments to reshape and/or refine historical skills.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently in transition and does not yet fully reflect the revised National Curriculum. For example, students have insufficient opportunities to study the 'impact through time' of key themes in history. Consequently, their understanding of change and continuity over time is less well developed.
- The new curriculum leader recognises that planning for progression in key concepts and key processes, including sharing the criteria for success, are not yet fully developed. However, since his appointment in September, he has made an excellent start in adapting the curriculum and good plans are in place to secure its development further.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, detailed programmes of study have been developed which reflect examination requirements.

- Students in Key Stage 4 say how much they enjoy their GCSE studies. They appreciate the way in which the curriculum builds their understanding of international relations and how they feel that they are better able to understand contemporary events in the light of this.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management in history are good.

- The new curriculum leader has made a great start in developing the work of the department. His understanding of the department's strengths and areas for development is informed by excellent self-evaluation. A focus on developing the quality of teaching and learning and the use of new technologies is beginning to pay real dividends for both staff and students.
- At Key Stage 4, students' progress is tracked regularly and their performance is carefully monitored so that additional support can be put in place when needed. As a result, attainment is improving because staff are better supported and challenged to tackle students' underachievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the Key Stage 3 curriculum fully meets requirements by:
 - extending opportunities for students to study the 'impact through time' of key themes in history
 - ensuring that there is an explicit and well-defined approach to planning for progression in subject-specific skills so that teachers and students are able to evaluate progress more accurately across the curriculum.
- ensuring that highly effective marking and assessment practice is applied consistently and to good effect across the department, and that students routinely use feedback to improve their work with appropriate time given for reflection.

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

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector