

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



4 April 2011

Mrs C Skewes
Headteacher
Cornelius Vermuyden School and Arts College
Dinant Avenue
Canvey Island
Essex
SS8 9QS

Dear Mrs Skewes

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 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.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- While attainment in previous years has been low, standards improved very considerably in 2010 to be in line with the national average. The most able pupils made good progress and girls performed particularly well. However, boys' attainment remained too low.
- Current data, based on externally validated results, provide clear evidence that attainment is improving further with forecasts for current Year 11 students significantly higher than in previous years. Students have benefited from the opportunity to re-sit their first external assessment with the result that their achievement since Year 10 has increased markedly.
- Students in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory and improving progress by the end of their studies in Year 9. They develop good knowledge and understanding of topics studied in depth, for example the Norman Conquest or trench conditions in the First World War. They also develop

good skills on historical enquiry, particularly through their work investigating different sources of evidence. Less secure are their knowledge and understanding of historical interpretations, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, and their understanding of change and continuity within and across different periods.

- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. GCSE students articulate confidently how their studies help to build their understanding of modern society. They also value the subject as a qualification because, they say, 'people know it's hard'. Students behave well in most lessons. Occasionally, when lessons are less engaging, a few students lose focus and disrupt the learning of the rest of the group.
- While the proportion of students opting to pursue history beyond Year 9 remains significantly lower than seen in other schools, numbers are rising, with 19% of Year 10 students currently pursuing history, in contrast to 8% in previous years.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- In most lessons, teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan learning activities which engage students well. Teachers are passionate about history and, when teaching is most effective, their love for their subject is reflected in high levels of engagement by students.
- Learning is consistently informed by clear learning objectives and shared success criteria. This practice ensures that students and their teachers know how well students have done in each lesson.
- In Key Stage 4, teachers make good use of assessment criteria to ensure that students have a very clear understanding of what they need to do to achieve high marks in modular examinations. This practice is highly valued by students and is having a clear impact in raising achievement.
- The most successful lessons are fast-paced and challenging, with lessons informed by carefully devised and intellectually demanding enquiry questions. In these lessons, students make good and better progress because they can see the relevance and value of the learning activities. Good levels of motivation are reflected in their willingness to speculate and draw their own substantiated conclusions about important historical issues.
- When teaching is less effective, tasks are not matched well enough to students' individual needs, interests and prior attainment. This results in activities which sometimes do not offer an appropriate level of challenge.
- Teachers make good use of the extensive assessment information they have about students' prior attainment to plan learning activities which generally meet the needs of students of different abilities. Less consistent is their use of assessment during the lesson to monitor the progress of the whole group. Occasionally, this results in teachers providing insufficient support for students who are finding the lesson more challenging.

- Marking is good overall and excellent at Key Stage 4. Students know their targets in history and helpful stickers on the front of their books help explain what they need to do to achieve them. Opportunities are missed for students to evaluate their success in meeting their current targets before new targets for the next term's work are set.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- Year 7 students report that they enjoy learning history through Creative Studies. This provides good opportunities for cross-curricular working, for example, through high-quality investigations into the causes and consequences of the Canvey Flood. Mindful of the need to ensure that history receives sufficient attention, staff have sensibly modified the curriculum to ensure that history is delivered as a discrete subject within the creative curriculum.
- Other aspects of the Key Stage 3 curriculum are less well developed and the curriculum does not yet fully reflect the revised Key Stage 3 National Curriculum. There are some significant omissions, particularly with regard to the requirement to develop students' understanding of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity through history. There is insufficient balance between in-depth, thematic and overview studies. This inhibits students' ability to deepen their sense of chronology through considering change and continuity within and across different periods of history.
- Linked to this, while staff have a good understanding of students' overall performance in history, the curriculum does not yet articulate with sufficient clarity how students will make progress in developing their historical knowledge, skills and understanding across the full range of key concepts and processes.
- Students in Key Stage 4 report that they enjoy their GCSE studies. They appreciate the way in which the curriculum builds their understanding of modern Britain. For example, girls' were surprised to discover that the campaign for equal rights for women is a feature of such recent history.
- Provision for enrichment in history is weak. Opportunities are missed to build students' historical understanding and a genuine, lifelong sense of historical enquiry through visits to museums or sites of historical interest linked to their studies.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management in history are satisfactory.

- Improved leadership and management arrangements are proving to be successful in raising attainment at Key Stage 4. This is a result of much improved systems of monitoring and evaluation. Leaders and managers have sharpened their use of data so that staff can intervene quickly to address incidents of underachievement.

- Action planning is informed by accurate and effective self-evaluation. Leaders and managers are making good use of challenging targets to raise attainment. The humanities development plan is a highly effective document which sets clear and measurable targets by which staff can assess how well history, and other subjects, are performing against expectations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the Key Stage 3 curriculum fully meets requirements, by:
 - increasing opportunities for students to understand the diverse heritage of people living in the United Kingdom
 - ensuring that there is appropriate balance between in-depth studies, thematic studies and overviews
- improving planning for progression in Key Stage 3 so that students and their teachers have a clear understanding of how they can develop the full range of key historical concepts and processes
- improving provision for enrichment by providing opportunities for students to have first-hand experience of sites of historical interest and importance
- ensuring that all teaching is as good as the best.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector