

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



2 June 2011

Mr T Smith
Headteacher
The Magna Carta School
Thorpe Road
Staines
Surrey
TW18 3HJ

Dear Mr Smith

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 19 and 20 May 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 an assembly using historical material.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Standards are below average. GCSE results in 2010 were the lowest for some time. This year, projected grades are higher but still below average. Students make satisfactory progress and some of the controlled assessments for GCSE illustrate particularly good progress.
- Students' personal development is good. The significance of a history-based assembly on stereotyping was not lost on students. In the lessons observed, students' attitudes to the study of history were good and their behaviour was outstanding.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they have excellent professional relationships with students. They have an enthusiasm for the subject which they convey. As a consequence, the subject is a very popular option. Teachers are always willing to help and students value this.
- The weakest element in teaching is the tendency to give students insufficient opportunities to define their own questions, find answers and then communicate them. As a result, students' understanding is inhibited and progress slows.
- Provision for discussion is good. However, this is not always translated into written work of the depth and quality required to ensure that students understand sufficiently to be able to achieve well in examinations.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum covers a broad range of topics and relevant skills and in doing so, meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The approach to many of the topics is imaginative, such as the recent work on life in the trenches. There are a reasonable number of visits to places of historical interest.
- Students interviewed said that they were happy with the curriculum and were enjoying what is taught. However, a few older students understandably said that too much time is spent on Nazi Germany and not enough on more recent history linked to current issues.
- The department has already identified the reasons for weaknesses in students' achievements and part of its response is to revise the curriculum around topics that give the students more opportunity to choose what to study and how to go about it. The revision has begun in Year 7 with the Native American project. This is a good initiative and the department intends to introduce this approach progressively to other year groups.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- Since the poor examination results in 2010, the department's self-evaluation has significantly improved. This has been aided by the introduction of a good tracking system providing more precise data on students' performance. This information is beginning to be used to inform teaching and feedback to students resulting in their improved performance. It is, however, early days and the department is aware that there is some way to go in the use of the data to improve outcomes.
- Senior leaders in the school are very committed to the subject and provide considerable support to improve achievement. The subject's place in the whole-school curriculum is very secure.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement by:
 - providing students with opportunities to take more responsibility for their learning
 - improving students' knowledge and understanding through developing their ability to communicate in writing.
- further refining the tracking system to provide information that is better used to inform teaching and provide students with meaningful targets.

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

Paul Armitage
Additional Inspector