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Mrs J Long  
Principal  
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Dear Mrs Long

### **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 23 and 24 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 you, staff and students; a scrutiny of relevant documentation; an analysis of students' work; and the observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

#### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Students' attainment at Key Stage 4 has fluctuated recently and results in the GCSE examinations are well below average. However, most students in the sixth form gain a pass grade in the AS- and A-level examinations. Not enough students gain the higher grades in public examinations yet.
- From relatively low starting points, students make good progress in history. In some instances, their progress is outstanding because of particular strengths in the teaching. Students enjoy learning the subject and are aware that events in the past are open to different interpretations.
- Students are developing their historical knowledge and understanding well. In Year 9, for example, they understand why Neville Chamberlain followed a policy of appeasement with Hitler in the 1930s.

- Students can think critically about the past, and they are confident about expressing their ideas and opinions. The more able can support their interpretations and arguments well through extended writing. Others often have weak literacy skills and these hinder their progress. The department is addressing this through a greater emphasis on developing students' reading and writing skills.
- Students' enquiry skills are developed well and they can work competently with a good range of historical sources. Those in Year 11, for instance, can compare two sources about the Rebecca Riots and can draw valid conclusions.
- Students' personal development is excellent. They are polite and well behaved. They work well with each other and with adults. They sustain their concentration on the tasks set. Many are keen to contribute to whole-class discussions, or to read aloud.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- A wide range of activities is used for the different abilities. This includes the use of digital projectors and interactive whiteboards, the use of textbooks and worksheets, and work in pairs and in small groups.
- Teachers possess excellent subject knowledge and know the requirements of examination syllabuses. They use this knowledge well to extend and challenge students' understanding of the topics being studied.
- Lessons are briskly paced, with good use of time. Activities are explicitly timed and good whole-class teaching points are made to inject pace to the learning. As a result, students respond well, are engaged in the learning and make faster progress.
- Teachers manage classes in a friendly but firm manner. Lessons are characterised by mutual respect and good relationships between staff and students.
- Lessons are well planned and the needs of all abilities are identified. Learning support assistants help particular individuals well. However, specific learning targets are not routinely identified in the planning for different groups of students, making evaluation of their progress more difficult.
- Students' work is regularly marked. They are offered good feedback which they value. The written feedback identifies targets for improvement which helps the students to enhance their progress.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets requirements. The examination courses studied at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form promote interest and enjoyment for the students.

- The curriculum is coherently organised and important aspects of local, national and world events are taught. Appropriate emphasis is given to enquiry-based approaches. Opportunities to study different times, and places across time, are combined with in-depth studies.
- Emphasis on the use and evaluation of different types of historical sources is good. Students are enabled to develop their skills as historians well.
- Some good enrichment experiences are provided. Students visit places of historical interest to complement their work in classrooms. Places regularly visited include the Black Country Living Museum, Kenilworth Castle and Rockingham Castle. In addition, visitors are invited to talk about their experiences, for example veterans from the Second World War.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The subject is well led by an energetic and committed subject leader. There is a clear and shared vision on how to improve outcomes for students. Staff work hard and the students value this.
- There are well established procedures to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the subject. Lessons are regularly observed, students' work is scrutinised and their feedback is sought. Weaknesses are systematically tackled.
- Very good procedures are being implemented for assessing and monitoring students' progress. They are made aware of how to improve their performance and appropriate action is taken for those underachieving, for example through intensive mentoring. This aspect is a particular strength of the department's work and is promoted across the college as part of its specialist provision.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that more students achieve the higher grades in public examinations
- ensuring that explicit targets for different groups of students are routinely identified in the teachers' lesson planning and that students' progress towards these targets is regularly evaluated.

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

**Champak Chauhan**  
**Additional Inspector**