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Mr P Luxmoore
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Luxmoore

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 17 and 18 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.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment is high and students make at least good progress by the end of each key stage.
- At Key Stage 3, achievement is good. Some students make outstanding progress as seen, for example, in the work of Year 9 students on the causes of the First World War.
- For several years, attainment at GCSE has been consistently above average, sometimes high, but achievement has been variable. However, current estimates of performance indicate that more students are on track to attain excellent results this summer.
- In the sixth form, attainment is high and achievement is outstanding. Students are challenged in their work and make excellent progress in their learning. They particularly enjoy the flexibility offered by the personal enquiry option.

- Students are developing a good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They explain their ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions.
- Students are developing a good understanding of why people and events are significant in history and they have a keen awareness of the importance of analysing different interpretations. They have a healthy respect for evidence; they appreciate its importance, its value and its limitations.
- History makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and enjoy the lessons, as demonstrated by the increasing numbers opting for the subject at both GCSE and in the sixth form. The climate for learning in history is excellent.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Excellent subject knowledge is used to plan learning activities which engage students well. Teachers have high expectations and relationships between students and teachers are first rate.
- Teachers have a clear understanding of examination requirements. Students are well supported, feel well prepared for external examinations and appreciate the advice and guidance given.
- In the best lessons observed, teaching and learning met the needs of all students. A range of activities provided challenge and developed students' historical thinking. Excellent questioning encouraged students to reflect on the information and evidence with which they were being presented and to make well-substantiated judgements.
- These opportunities were not seen in all lessons and there was a tendency for some teachers to talk too much and to try to cover too much in the time available. When this occurred, learning was slowed and progress restricted.
- Marking is good and provides students with effective guidance. Praise is given when appropriate and comments made on the quality of work are both helpful and diagnostic. Students on examination courses particularly praised the quality of the feedback they received in helping them know how to improve.
- The department has developed a series of assessment exercises at Key Stage 3 and detailed mark schemes to guide teachers. However, the department acknowledges that there is no portfolio of moderated exemplars to guide teachers in their marking of these assessed pieces of work.
- Independent learning is being developed well in history and teachers create varied opportunities for students to take greater responsibility for their learning.

- Teachers' and students' use of information and communication technology to enhance learning is variable and opportunities are not being taken to exploit this technology fully.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced but it does not yet fully reflect the revised National Curriculum. For example, local history is not fully exploited and coverage is insufficient of the different histories and changing relationships through time of the peoples of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Consequently, students' understanding of how the United Kingdom has evolved as an ethnically and culturally diverse society is not fully well developed.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students enjoy the examination specifications. At A level, for example, they particularly like the variety of topics they study from the early modern and more recent periods.
- Cross-curricular links with other subjects are good, for example, with English on the poetry of the First World War, and with a range of subjects in connection with the work in Year 7 on the medieval banquet.
- The curriculum is enriched through a variety of visits and out of classroom activities and the department is considering introducing additional enrichment opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The head of department has established a strong sense of purpose and direction for the subject and he is keen to maintain and develop history's strong profile in the school. He leads a department with high aspirations and this helps to explain the good, and sometimes, outstanding progress made by students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the department's improvement plan identifies clear actions which will help to develop the subject further. The head of department monitors his team closely and provides appropriate support and guidance.
- Teachers are reflective and want to improve their practice. They cooperate well and share good ideas. Their passion for the subject is obvious and is recognised by students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening assessment practice at Key Stage 3 by developing a collection of moderated samples of students' work for key assessment exercises
- further developing the curriculum at Key Stage 3 so that it fully meets statutory requirements

- ensuring that technology is exploited to best effect in the teaching and learning.

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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector