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8 July 2011

Mr M Bennison  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Bennison

### **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 28 and 29 June 2011, with Kevin Jane HMI, 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been above average for two out of the past three years and this represents good progress given students' broadly average ability on entry to the school. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress. However, sometimes, more able students are not challenged enough to attain the highest grades at GCSE.
- Students receive a good introduction to historical thinking in Year 7 and their work is very well structured throughout Key Stage 3 to ensure that they make at least good progress. By Year 9, students are able to offer their own views confidently.
- Students find the demands of Year 12 work in the sixth form challenging, but they make good progress and attain broadly average results at A level.

- History makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development. Students behave extremely well and they enjoy working hard because they can see that this enables them to make good progress and gain important qualifications at GCSE. Students work well together and present their findings to the whole class clearly and confidently.

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

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge extremely well to plan lesson activities which enable students to develop their knowledge and understanding of history through each key stage.
- Teachers employ an excellent range of strategies to encourage students to think carefully about their work and how best to present it to others. Students have good opportunities to debate, discuss and challenge each other on their history tasks, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Teachers make excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve students' learning. For example, students regularly contribute to departmental video presentations of key facts and ideas. Students use their ICT skills extremely well to produce electronic presentations, analyse sources and access work through the school's virtual learning environment. Students say that they find these video clips and ICT experiences extremely useful and that they help them to become more responsible for their own learning.
- Marking and assessment of work are good and the careful tracking of students' progress enables teachers to identify how well students make progress in specific skills over time.

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

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum enables students to achieve well, and planning for new skills and themes has been embedded effectively. Links are strong with other subjects and history is often the context for learning in English and drama.
- At Key Stage 4, the current specifications, including Ancient History, have had an extremely positive impact on students' attainment and interest in the subject. History is a popular subject at GCSE and growing numbers indicate they wish to study history in the sixth form. Key Stage 4 students spoke knowledgeably and well about their studies. Sixth form students were able to engage in quite sophisticated dialogue about the nature and relevance of the subject.
- The sixth form curriculum has been enriched extremely well by the introduction of the International Baccalaureate to supplement specifications covering the age of Justinian and the modern world.

- Students have a good knowledge of current global issues, and the subject contributes extremely well to the school's aim of developing global citizenship.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- The subject leader knows exactly what needs to be done to sustain excellence in the future. He has developed a dynamic department of young teachers who are passionate about history and very keen to employ the right teaching approaches to engage all groups of students. However, despite clear aims and objectives, the formal departmental handbook does not make it explicit enough why topics and themes have been chosen. Self-evaluation is excellent.
- The processes for monitoring the day-to-day work of the department are excellent and lesson plans are reviewed regularly. The subject leader acts as a coach and his excellent teaching skills are being used as a model for other teachers in the school. Plans are in place for other members of the department to be trained to work in a similar whole school way, demonstrating the school's confidence in their teaching abilities.

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

- ensuring that able students are challenged appropriately so that more of them attain the highest grades
- strengthening the rationale sections in the subject handbook so that it is clearer why topics have been chosen for study.

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

**Peter Limm**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**