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Ms S Staab
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Staab

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 20 and 21 September 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- From well above average starting points, students make good progress in history with the result that attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is high. In 2011, 55% of students attained grades A* to A in GCSE history, which is a significant improvement on the previous two years. In 2011, a small proportion of students did not achieve well enough with the result that, while high, the proportion of students attaining grades A* to C was below target. Almost all students currently in Year 11 are making good progress and results in externally validated modular tests provide strong evidence that attainment is set to rise further.
- Success rates in history in the sixth form are high at A level and in the history component of the International Baccalaureate. The most able students make outstanding progress in the sixth form.

- Students in Key Stage 3 develop excellent knowledge and understanding of topics studied in depth. Students are also skilled in evaluating historical evidence and presenting their analysis in high-quality extended writing. Less well developed is students' understanding of how and why historical interpretations change over time.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Behaviour is most often outstanding though very occasionally, when teaching is not sufficiently well paced, a few students become less attentive. Students' appreciation of the impact of history in shaping modern British society and particularly its impact on cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is not fully developed.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teaching benefits from teachers' excellent subject knowledge and expertise, with the result that some teaching, particularly in the sixth form, is outstanding.
- Teachers' good use of assessment information ensures that activities are most often designed to meet the needs of the whole group very well. Occasionally, strategies designed to ensure that learning is accessible for all result in insufficient challenge for middle and lower attainers, particularly in Key Stage 3. This is sometimes compounded by key questions which are not inspiring or demanding enough.
- Teachers are skilled in devising varied activities to secure good levels of enjoyment and engagement. Students reported that they enjoy regular opportunities to debate historical issues and to work collaboratively.
- Students are very well prepared for public examinations through regular assessments and through strategies to build their familiarity with examination papers and mark schemes. Students have a good understanding of the specific actions that they need to take to meet their targets.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- History is a popular and successful subject with almost two thirds of current Year 10 students pursuing the subject to GCSE.
- Sixth form students benefit from the option of pursuing history to A level or through the International Baccalaureate.
- Students preparing for examinations receive excellent support through extra-curricular revision sessions and one-to-one support. Sixth form students considering studying history at University receive high-quality support and guidance.
- However, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is not fully matched to students' capabilities and this helps to explain why some teaching is not challenging

enough. Opportunities to broaden students' knowledge and understanding through thematic and overview studies are limited. Provision for the study of local history, British Isles history and the movement and settlement through time of people to, from and within the United Kingdom is not fully developed.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- In a short space of time, the subject leader has had a clear impact in strengthening provision and raising standards in history, as reflected in the proportion of students attaining the highest grades at GCSE.
- Monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation procedures have been strengthened. As a result, procedures to ensure greater consistency in teaching are beginning to have a clear impact. Self-evaluation is extremely rigorous, honest and accurate and is used very effectively to highlight key priorities.
- The subject leader has rightly focused on securing high attainment in Key Stages 4 and 5 in his first year in post. While still at the early stages, plans to strengthen the Key Stage 3 curriculum are now being formulated.
- Morale in the department is high. Staff are highly committed and work well together as a team, willingly sharing resources and lesson ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the history curriculum at Key Stage 3 by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum consistently provides high levels of challenge for all groups of students
 - providing more opportunities for students to broaden their understanding of the subject through thematic and overview studies
 - ensuring that the curriculum gives sufficient coverage to local history, British Isles history and the movement and settlement of diverse peoples to, from and within the UK.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector