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29 September 2011

Mr J Oddie
Principal
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Dear Mr Oddie

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 21 and 22 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- All groups of students, including those in the sixth form, achieve well. Those in Key Stage 3 have made consistently good progress in the last three years and GCSE students' progress has improved and is now good. While the proportion obtaining A* to C grades is broadly average, the percentage who achieve A* to A grades has been consistently above average for several years.
- The department has been successful in closing some gaps between the attainment of particular groups of students. Although girls continue to obtain more of the highest grades, an identical proportion of boys achieved A* to C grades in the 2011 GCSE examinations.
- Students show a firm grasp of the importance of studying history and recognise the light this can shed on contemporary issues. As one Year 10

student put it, 'the way everything is now is because of what's happened in the past'. Another in Year 13 identified that 'you see the world differently' as a result of studying history.

- Students have a good understanding of the importance of evaluating sources carefully and how and why historians might assign differing significance to events and individuals in the past. They grasp the complexity of explaining events and how causes might be analysed in different ways, for example the outbreak of the First World War involving long- and short-term factors.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy the subject and recognise the passion and commitment of their teachers. Students particularly value the opportunities to develop and contribute their own views in lessons as well as being consulted about possible improvements to their courses.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons and sequences of lessons are well planned and teachers have a strong commitment to providing interesting, varied and engaging activities to which students respond well.
- In the lessons observed, teachers' expectations were high and they used their subject knowledge well to press students to think through and justify their ideas. Carefully chosen historical sources were often employed and learning proceeded at a brisk pace, although sometimes the links between different parts of the lessons were not always made clearly and smoothly enough.
- Students appreciate the helpful comments teachers make on their work, particularly those that offer guidance on how to do better. Students on examination courses value the one-to-one discussions with staff and the support provided in setting and meeting targets for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- Key Stage 3 is now taught in Years 7 and 8 which has required much revision to the curriculum. This is being conducted thoughtfully and systematically. The department has correctly identified the need to ensure that progression in skills and understanding is secure as new planning is put in place and that students' work is carefully compared and considered to support teachers in making assessments.
- The department is alert to the need to ensure that Key Stage 3 provides solid foundations for students' later study of the subject. Once new planning is in place throughout Years 7 and 8, this will require careful evaluation.

- The curricula for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form meet examination requirements well and are carefully designed to ensure that students continue to benefit from varied and engaging approaches.
- Students value the considerable support provided in helping them to improve their capacity to write at some length. They also benefit from a good range of visits and visitors that enhances the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The head of department is deeply committed to history and its role in developing students' understanding of the world around them. She works closely with her new team to ensure the effective, continuing development of the subject.
- The team is enthusiastic and includes several in the early stages of their careers who benefit from the good-quality schemes of work. Plans for teachers to observe each other and share practice are at an early stage.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, resulting in clear and appropriate priorities and plans for further improvement.
- The progress of individual students is frequently and closely monitored and additional support or challenge provided as necessary. However, the department's data are not routinely analysed to check the progress of groups of students, for example those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- analysing the progress made by different groups of students routinely so that factors underpinning any variations might be more readily identified and action taken
- providing opportunities for teachers to observe each other's practice as part of actions to improve the quality of teaching further.

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.

Yours sincerely

Grahame Sherfield
Her Majesty's Inspector