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14 October 2011

Mrs D Morrison OBE
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Morrison

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 5 and 6 October 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 outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Students make excellent progress in history. They have a good introduction to historical thinking in Year 7 and their work is extremely well structured throughout Key Stage 3 to ensure that they make outstanding progress. By Year 9, students are able to offer their own opinions confidently, and use examples very well from across Key Stage 3 to support their views. By the end of Key Stage 4, students defend their points of view extremely well and demonstrate a keen interest in developments in the modern world.
- Students find the demands of Year 12 work challenging, but they make good progress and attain above average results at AS and broadly average results at A level. There is a good record of students gaining admission to read history at university.

- 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 excellent progress towards gaining important qualifications at GCSE. Even students who did not opt for history at GCSE said that they enjoyed the subject throughout Key Stage 3. 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.

- All teachers are qualified history specialists and they use their excellent subject knowledge extremely well to plan engaging and interesting lesson activities which enable students to quickly develop an excellent grasp of the main concepts and skills 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 good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve students' learning. For example, students are encouraged to access the department's website from home to support work done in class.
- The marking and assessment of work are excellent, though there is a lack of a consistent and systematic approach to marking spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Opportunities are sometimes missed to ensure that students in the sixth form, and especially more able girls, appropriately develop analytical and discursive writing skills in their extended essays.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The department has planned and developed an extremely interesting Key Stage 3 curriculum which is supported very well by an excellent set of homework projects. These projects enable students throughout the key stage to choose their own topics for independent study and research. Excellent advice is given to parents concerning how best to support their children undertaking the research and writing for these projects. These are assessed rigorously and the resulting performance information is linked very carefully to regular class-based assessments.
- The emphasis on developing students' historical knowledge and understanding is excellent. These aspects are strengthened through links with other subjects, such as a joint focus with drama on the Holocaust, and with English on writing story books about witchcraft. There is an

excellent local community link when students in Year 7 interview residents of a care home about their experiences of the Blitz.

- The school organises an excellent range of visits to places of historical interest locally as well as nationally and abroad, such as trips to Berlin and Auschwitz. Students say how much they value these opportunities because, as one student said, they see 'more clearly what life and conditions were like at the time'.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- The head of department has succeeded extremely well in generating an excellent team spirit and ethos for history after a previous humanities structure was reorganised. She has an excellent grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of history, which the accurate and well-constructed departmental self-evaluation demonstrates very clearly. The subject is monitored very well and departmental evaluations and improvement plans indicate clearly how teachers are keen to share their ideas with each other and explore new initiatives positively.
- There is a constant drive to improve teaching approaches and this is reinforced by the school's status as a training establishment which has enabled the history department to have close links with university tutors and teacher training programmes.
- The monitoring of teaching is effective and is supported by regular work reviews and discussions with students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a consistent and systematic approach to marking spelling, punctuation and grammar
- ensuring that sixth-form students, and especially able girls, have more opportunities to develop their analytic and discursive writing skills.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector