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Mr C Taylor  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Taylor

### **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 between 26 and 28 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- The achievement of all groups of GCSE students is satisfactory. Although results at GCSE have been somewhat disappointing in recent years, they improved in 2011 and the school's data indicate much improved progress among current Year 11 students. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory with results are broadly in line with national averages. Key Stage 3 students achieve well in response to the range of engaging activities provided.
- Students show a firm grasp of the importance of studying history and, as one Year 9 put it, how 'the past affects us in our lives'. A sixth form student readily pointed out that history 'helps us to understand why we behave in the way we do'.

- Students often have a good understanding of the importance of evaluating sources and their provenance carefully. Some show a developing understanding of how historians' interpretations of key developments in the past might vary. Sixth form students demonstrated a grasp of some key debates among historians, for example over the Cold War, and how the context in which historians live and work can contribute to shaping their views.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy the subject, particularly when more active approaches to learning are adopted. Sixth form students in particular identified teachers' enthusiasm and noted that they 'live and breathe history'.

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

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers are committed to challenging students to think and often plan a variety of activities to support this. Interactive whiteboards are often used effectively to present a wide range of materials.
- In lessons observed, teaching was often good and students benefited from clear objectives, teachers' good subject knowledge and engaging activities, for example creating 'still images' of key episodes in 1066 in a Year 7 class. Occasional weaker features included not making the purposes underpinning lessons clear enough, and missing opportunities both to extend students' learning more fully and to match work more closely to the varying needs of the class.
- Students reported that they are well supported by teachers' marking as it provides clear guidance on how a particular piece of work might be improved. A new approach designed to improve students' grasp of progression in skills and understanding in history has just been introduced. However, there has been too little time for it to have its full impact. Some teachers provide opportunities for students to assess their own and each other's work but this is not consistent practice.

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

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The change to a two-year Key Stage 3 and to the length of lessons means that a review of the interesting range of themes and topics is rightly planned. Current planning varies in quality, particularly in the guidance given on differentiation. The department is wisely intending to revise approaches to assessment, to involve both ongoing teacher assessment as well as more formal identified opportunities, and to ensure that judgements are secure.
- The curriculum for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is designed to meet the requirements of the examination boards appropriately. Planning and lessons observed indicate a continuing commitment to engaging activities. However, teachers' ideas and resources are not currently captured fully in planning to share good practice and to learn from and support each other.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- The newly appointed subject leader is strongly committed to history's place in the curriculum and is keen to move the department forward. He is working with the team to ensure the effective and continuing development of the subject in the school.
- There is a clear and realistic view of the department's strengths and areas for development. Priorities have been correctly identified but there has not yet been time to incorporate these into a new subject improvement plan.
- The progress of individual students has been regularly checked. However, this has not resulted in consistent procedures which have clearly identified the impact of additional support or challenge which has been provided for individuals. The department has correctly identified this as an area for urgent attention.

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

- improving the quality and consistency of teaching by systematically reviewing schemes of work, identifying, capturing and sharing good practice and providing more guidance for staff in meeting the varying needs of all students
- identifying additional support or challenge required following checks on students' progress, monitoring the impact of any actions taken and making further adjustments as necessary
- improving the consistency of practice in assuring the quality of teachers' assessments and in involving students in assessing their own progress and identifying for themselves how to improve.

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

**Grahame Sherfield**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**