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Mr I Brew  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Brew

### **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 12 and 13 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly average and students make satisfactory progress overall. However, there is some variation in achievement between the key stages.
- At Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly average and, given their starting points, students make good progress, and some make outstanding progress, in developing their knowledge and understanding of the topics they study.
- For the last two years, achievement for Year 11 students at the end of their GCSE course has been inadequate and the proportions of students gaining grades A\* to C and grades A\* or A have both been significantly below average. In the sixth form, results have also been mixed. However,

the department has taken decisive action to remedy this situation. Current estimates of performance, based on robust data, indicate that achievement is improving and that more students in Year 11 and in the sixth form are on track to attain better results next summer.

- Students are challenged in their work and when given the opportunity, they explain their ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions.
- Students have good chronological understanding; they investigate sources well and some have a good understanding of utility. However, their understanding of how we might check the accuracy of accounts and sources, why people and events are significant in history, and why different interpretations must be handled with care is satisfactory rather than good.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and enjoy their lessons. They have positive attitudes to learning, behave extremely well in lessons and work well together and on their own. The subject is popular and take-up both at GCSE and in the sixth form is good.

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

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- While teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are satisfactory, overall teaching observed was good. However, it has not been sufficiently consistent over time to secure good progress for all students.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and reflective about their work. They have high expectations and use their excellent subject knowledge to help students make links with their previous learning.
- Lessons are planned well and, at Key Stage 3, teachers use a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. Teachers' use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning is good. However, students' use of ICT is variable and opportunities are not taken to exploit this technology fully.
- Whereas younger students noted how much they enjoyed the different ways in which they learnt history, older students commented that they would like to see more variety in their lessons.
- Although lessons are usually well-paced, teachers are sometimes too keen to pass on their knowledge to students and they do not give them sufficient opportunities to take the initiative and determine their own questions and lines of enquiry. Moreover, opportunities are not always taken to allow students to discuss and reflect upon what they are learning.
- Marking is variable. Where it is most helpful, it provides students with effective guidance. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students are given detailed advice but, at Key Stage 3, too many comments on students' work lack subject-specific guidance.

- In some lessons, teachers use ongoing assessment skilfully to ensure that students made at least good progress. However, such effective practice is not yet embedded across the department and teachers' expectations and the level of challenge provided are not always aligned closely enough to students' needs.

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

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers an appropriate range of topics from the Norman Invasion to the late 20th Century. However, there is insufficient depth on some topics and too much on others. Moreover, opportunities to study local history are limited and insufficient emphasis upon British Isles' history means that the curriculum is too narrow.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students enjoy the examination specifications. At A level, for example, they particularly like the variety of topics they study.
- Students' written literacy is well developed in history and there are effective links to the academy's Philosophy, Theology and Ethics (PTE) course through work on slavery and the holocaust. However, on the whole cross-curricular links are underdeveloped.
- Students interviewed during the inspection spoke of how much they had enjoyed the visit to the battlefields of France. However, curriculum enrichment opportunities are not being fully exploited.
- Schemes of work at Key Stage 3 provide a general outline of what should be taught. However, there is insufficient focus upon answering key historical questions through enquires and upon developing students' historical concepts and processes as they move through the key stage. Moreover, assessment tasks are not aligned closely enough with the schemes of work to provide students with sufficient opportunities to deepen their historical thinking and understanding.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- The head of department is establishing a strong sense of purpose and direction for the subject. He leads a team of teachers with high aspirations and who regard history as an academic subject but one which must be accessible for all students.
- Teachers are passionate about the subject and are keen to impart their enthusiasm to the students who appreciate their knowledge, expertise and hard work. Morale is high, there is a strong team spirit within the department and there is a tangible drive to improve outcomes for students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the department has identified strengths and appropriate priorities for further improvement.

- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teachers benefit from teaching in adjoining rooms, cooperate well and readily share good practice.

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

- developing teaching strategies so that students have more opportunities to:
  - take the initiative and determine their own questions and lines of enquiry
  - discuss and reflect upon what they are learning
- developing assessment practice to ensure that:
  - in lessons expectation and challenge are more closely aligned to students' needs
  - students are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- strengthening provision at Key Stage 3 by ensuring that the curriculum offers sufficient range and depth
- ensuring that schemes of work identify clearly the concepts and processes being developed and that the tasks and assessments which are aligned to them provide students with opportunities to deepen their historical thinking and understanding.

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

**Michael Maddison**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**