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Mr S Knight
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Dear Mr Knight

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 17 and 18 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Students make good progress in Key Stage 4 with the result that attainment in GCSE history is high. The achievement of boys and girls in 2011 was outstanding. Boys' attainment at the highest grades rose significantly in 2011 to be very closely aligned with the consistently high attainment seen for the most able girls.
- Achievement in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. While students generally make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons, their attainment is hindered by insufficient curriculum time in history. Hence, while students have good knowledge and understanding of the topics studied, for example the Norman Conquest and the English Civil War, the range and breadth of their knowledge is more limited.

- Success rates in the sixth form are satisfactory and attainment by the end of Year 13 is broadly average. However, while students make satisfactory progress overall, there is significant variation in students' achievement between different parts of the course in Years 12 and 13.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. All groups of students benefit from opportunities to study the histories of cultures other than their own. Students behave well in history and, when teaching is strongest, their behaviour is outstanding. Occasionally in Key Stage 3 lessons, some students lose focus because teaching and the curriculum are not effective enough in securing their enjoyment and engagement.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- There is some good and outstanding teaching. The use of assessment to support the learning of GCSE students is excellent. Marking in Key Stages 4 and 5 is consistently of high quality. Students benefit from very regular opportunities to assess their own and each other's work against clear examination criteria. As a result, students can confidently articulate how well they are doing in history. They know, precisely, what they need to do to raise their attainment.
- Teachers make good use of technology to promote learning through, for example, the use of digital display to exemplify effective writing in history.
- Despite these strengths, there remains too much satisfactory teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. While teaching promotes an investigative approach to learning, the enquiry questions used to underpin lessons are not sufficiently challenging or engaging. In some lessons, the pace of learning is too slow. Learning activities fail to secure the engagement of the whole class for all parts of the lesson. Teaching does not ensure, consistently, that students understand the relevance or importance of the topic studied. The quality of marking in Key Stage 3 is less consistent than in the other key stages.
- The use of assessment to plan learning which fully meets the needs of the whole group is not consistent. While some groupings in lessons were informed by teachers' knowledge of students' prior attainment, planning is not sufficiently focused on how teaching will fully meet students' differing needs. Sometimes teachers too readily accept answers from volunteers. This limits their capacity to measure the progress of the whole group.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- Students studying history to GCSE and A level benefit from a curriculum which provides good range and depth. The sixth form curriculum is enhanced by the use of articles and books by leading academics. Sixth-form students achieve particularly well in their A-level coursework which is

well matched to their needs and interests and provides good preparation for higher education.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum ensures appropriate coverage of the full range of key concepts and processes and ensures that students have opportunities to study history through a combination of depth, thematic and overview studies. Good links with English with regard to extended writing are helping to strengthen writing skills through shared language with regard to structured, analytical writing across all key stages.
- However, the limited curriculum time currently available for history is not used well enough to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are given sufficient coverage. As a result, there are significant gaps in students' knowledge. In addition, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is not matched well enough to students' needs, interests or their varying levels of attainment. Students have limited opportunities to engage in rigorous, independent historical enquiry about subjects in which they are interested. This helps to explain why take-up at GCSE is lower than seen nationally, and particularly low for boys and lower attaining students.
- Provision for enrichment is good. The curriculum is enhanced by visits to sites of historical interest in Britain and abroad, as well as visitors to the school brokered, for example, through the Holocaust Memorial Trust.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- Self-evaluation has accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement in history. For example, staff are well aware that insufficient curriculum time is currently allocated to history in Key Stage 3 and plans are fully in place to extend the time available for history from September 2012. Strategies to strengthen planning for progression in the development of students' subject-specific skills in history are developing well. Strategies to raise boys' attainment in GCSE history have been markedly successful.
- However, leaders and managers have not been sufficiently effective in securing consistently good teaching in history or in addressing variations in performance in different aspects of the AS and A level history. They have not ensured that the limited time available for Key Stage 3 history has been used well enough to secure good achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the Key Stage 3 curriculum by:
 - increasing the time available for the study of history
 - ensuring that this time is fully exploited to make sure that students' knowledge is sufficiently wide-ranging
 - ensuring that the curriculum promotes high-quality, rigorous historical thinking, fast-paced and challenging learning and

that it fully meets the needs and interests of all groups of learners, including boys and lower attaining students.

- strengthening the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that achievement in Key Stages 3 and 5 matches the outstanding achievement seen in Key Stage 4, by:
 - ensuring that all lessons secure good or outstanding progress
 - increasing the impact of monitoring and evaluation in strengthening the quality of teaching and learning
 - reducing variations in achievement between the constituent parts of the sixth form curriculum.

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