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Ms S Hargadon
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hargadon

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 8 and 9 November 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form attainment is high and students make outstanding progress. For example, for the last four years the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C at GCSE and grades A* to B at A level have been consistently well above average.
- At Key Stage 3, attainment is above average and students make good progress. Some make outstanding progress.
- Students have an excellent understanding of the topics they study. They explain their ideas clearly in discussions and in their written work, and provide a wide range of evidence to support their opinions. Their historical thinking is extremely well developed, not least because of a consistent

focus upon active learning based on enquiries, problem solving and independent learning.

- Students have excellent chronological understanding. They investigate sources confidently and have a healthy respect for evidence; they are aware of its importance, its value and its limitations.
- History is an extremely popular subject at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and it makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Students have positive attitudes to learning, behave extremely well in lessons and work well together and on their own. They are motivated by the enthusiasm of their teachers and, in the words of one Year 9 student, feel that 'history is just brilliant'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers are adept at using their excellent subject knowledge and classroom expertise to provide dynamic learning opportunities which engage students and help many of them to make outstanding progress.
- Lesson planning is exemplary and the needs of all students are carefully considered. Relationships are excellent and students appreciate being challenged to think and given time to reflect on their learning.
- Teachers create many opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning. Students say how much they enjoy lessons because the exercises and tasks encourage them to take an active role in their learning. This helps them to make excellent progress.
- A range of assessment techniques is used effectively to monitor students' progress and help them to improve. Marking is first-rate at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and ensures that students are clear about what they have to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- Students enthuse about the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. As a result, they look forward to lessons, engage eagerly in their learning and make outstanding progress.
- Students preparing for examinations receive excellent support and appreciate the extra-curricular advice given through revision summaries, targeted revision sessions, and, at GCSE, the residential revision session.
- Cross-curricular links are effective. The promotion of students' literacy skills, for example, is extremely well developed in all year groups, and using the correct historical terminology is an important and successful feature of lessons.
- Curriculum enrichment is outstanding and students talk animatedly about how these activities strengthen their learning.

- At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is broad and covers topics from Norman times to the late 20th Century. However, opportunities to broaden students' knowledge and understanding through thematic and overview studies are limited. In addition, provision for the study of local history, British Isles history, and the movement and settlement through time of people to, from and within the United Kingdom is not fully developed.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- Although relatively new in post, the subject leader has shown that she has a strong sense of purpose and is keen to maintain and develop history's strong profile in the school. There is a palpable commitment to ensuring that history is accessible for all students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the subject leader has a clear and accurate picture of the subject's strengths and areas for improvement.
- There is a rigorous system for monitoring students' progress. Examination results are closely analysed and appropriate action is taken to ensure that high standards of attainment are maintained.
- The department has an excellent ethos. Teachers are passionate about the subject, have high expectations and work closely as a team, sharing their ideas as a matter of course and seeking always to improve their practice. This supportive and collaborative approach makes a significant contribution to the subject's popularity in the school and to students' outstanding achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further strengthening the curriculum at Key Stage 3 by:
 - providing more opportunities for students to broaden their understanding of the subject through thematic and overview studies
 - ensuring that the curriculum gives sufficient coverage to local history, British Isles history and the movement and settlement of diverse peoples to, from and within the UK.

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