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Mr J Hedley
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Dear Mr Hedley

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 2 and 3 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Achievement is good across all key stages because the quality of learning and progress are good in lessons and over time. Consequently, from broadly average starting points students consistently attain results in national tests that are above average.
- In the majority of lessons observed, students made good gains in developing their knowledge and understanding. However, students' understanding of how national and international events have shaped local developments, and vice versa, is more limited.
- Students are becoming increasingly adept at evaluating a range of sources to develop well-reasoned arguments. For example, Year 11 students are

able to confidently examine the importance of the Liberal social reforms through the critical use of a set of historical sources.

- Students benefit from opportunities to develop a good understanding of significance when judging the relative importance of a range of factors relating to an historical enquiry. For example, Year 7 students worked together well to construct a clear understanding of what life was like in the Middle Ages and how it differed depending on wealth and social class.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students demonstrate real enthusiasm for history. It is a subject which is much enjoyed and increasing numbers are choosing to study it at GCSE. When given the opportunity, learners are inquisitive and enjoy planning their own learning. Students' cooperative approach to working together and with their teachers is a notable feature of lessons.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons well to meet the needs of all students and establish a clear focus on learning objectives and learning outcomes. A good start has been made to developing extended writing skills so that students are being increasingly challenged to fully demonstrate exceptional performance.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers create good opportunities for students to work in pairs and in teams to steer learning by developing ideas of their own and extending their historical skills. Occasionally, though, such opportunities are constrained by overly directed teaching and/or insufficient time for reflection.
- Marking and assessment are good though some variability exists within the department. At Key Stage 4, marking consistently ensures that students are clear about the next steps in their learning. However, opportunities are missed to capitalise on the significant potential of students to develop their own learning through the use of teachers' comments to reshape and/or refine historical skills.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently in transition and does not yet fully reflect the revised National Curriculum. For example, students have insufficient opportunities to study the 'impact through time' of key themes in history. Consequently, students' understanding of change and continuity over time is less well developed.
- The new curriculum leader recognises that planning for progression in key concepts and key processes, including sharing the criteria for success, are not yet fully developed. However, since her appointment in September she has made an excellent start in adapting the curriculum and good plans are in place to secure its development further.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is good. Detailed programmes of study have been developed which reflect examination requirements. Students say how much they enjoy their GCSE studies and how the programme of study supports their ability to better understand contemporary events.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The new subject leader has made a positive start in developing the work of the department. The good-quality planning, alongside effective support from school leaders, has led to the development of a strong platform for further improvement based on accurate self-evaluation.
- Students' progress is monitored regularly and their performance is carefully monitored so that additional support can be put in place when it is needed.
- In a short space of time the subject leader has secured a strong ethos and culture of teamwork within the department. Teachers are committed to developing their practice, sharing and strengthening their expertise. Plans are in place to exploit local networks so that teaching and the Key Stage 3 curriculum is enriched to ensure greater relevance of the local context.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the Key Stage 3 curriculum fully meets requirements by:
 - ensuring that there is an explicit and well-defined approach to planning for progression in subject-specific skills and extending opportunities for students to study the 'impact through time' of key themes in history
 - making full use of the rich local and cultural heritage to develop students' understanding of the relationship between local developments and history on a national and international scale
- ensuring that highly effective marking and assessment practice is applied consistently across the curriculum so that students routinely use feedback to improve their work with appropriate time given for reflection.

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

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector