

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



16 November 2011

Mrs C Leach
Headteacher
Sion-Manning RC School for Girls
75 St Charles Square
London
W10 6EL

Dear Mrs Leach

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 1 and 2 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 six 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 above average. This reflects good achievement overall and achievement for some students is outstanding.
- Achievement in Key Stage 3 is only satisfactory because not all students have received sufficient curriculum time to fully develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in history. While students have good knowledge and understanding of the topics studied in depth, some groups of learners, particularly in Year 8, have not studied enough history. As a result, these students do not have sufficient breadth of knowledge.
- History makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development overall. Older students are passionate about history and

value the subject's role in helping them to understand the world around them. They thrive in lessons because teaching is consistently challenging, engaging and stimulating. However, some younger students report that history does not always engage them because the topics they study do not always reflect their needs and interests and teaching strategies sometimes lack variety.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teaching in history is currently delivered by an experienced subject leader and two participants from the Teach First programme. While there is some good and outstanding teaching, the large majority of lessons secure satisfactory progress because the newer entrants to the profession have not developed the full range of skills needed to secure consistently good learning. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching is improving and a number of the satisfactory lessons seen had some strong features.
- In the most effective lessons, students made good progress because tasks empowered them to take responsibility for their own learning and to collaborate with others in drawing their own conclusions about the past. Students thrive when given opportunities to make judgements and draw their own hypotheses about the past. For example, in one Year 11 lesson seen, students made well informed judgements about the accuracy of the nomenclature 'the swinging sixties'. Teaching strategies were highly effective in helping all students to make decisions about the past and in holding them to account for their decisions.
- In lessons which secure only satisfactory progress, learning activities are less effective in cultivating students' skills of historical enquiry. Tasks are not sufficiently open-ended for students to take ownership of their own learning for extended periods of the lesson. On occasions, good learning is inhibited because of a lack of clarity in teachers' lesson planning about what precisely is to be achieved and why this is important.
- Marking is of good quality and ensures that most students have a good understanding of what they need to do to raise their attainment. Students appreciate the regular guidance they are given which identifies what they have done well, together with the steps they should consider to secure further improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- Students coming to the end of their GCSE studies speak very positively about the Key Stage 4 curriculum. They particularly enjoy learning about the social history of post-war Britain because they can see its direct relevance to their lives today.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum offers some good opportunities to study topics in depth, for example, the impact of the Roman Empire on Britain in Year 7 and the transatlantic slave trade in Year 8. Students also benefit from

excellent opportunities to pursue their own interests through the extended project they undertake on an area of personal interest.

- However, the limited curriculum time in Key Stage 3, principally in Year 8, is not used well enough to ensure that all aspects of the revised National Curriculum receive equal coverage. As a result, good provision for studies in depth are not matched equally well by opportunities to deepen historical knowledge and understanding through overview studies and thematic approaches to history. There are limited opportunities to study local history and history linked to students' diverse heritages.
- Provision for enrichment is satisfactory. Students in Year 8 benefit from opportunities to engage in online video-conferencing with the National Archives to deepen their understanding of the transatlantic slave trade. Plans are in place to strengthen this aspect of provision through visits to sites of historical interest in London for Year 8 students in the summer term.
- Planning for progression in the development of students' subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding is at the early stages.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- History is well organised and rigorous procedures to monitor the quality and impact of provision are in place and particularly strong in Key Stage 4.
- Leaders and managers have responded innovatively to difficulties in recruiting high quality staff through partnership with the Teach First programme. Teach First participants benefit from good support overall from the school, though in this small department, they do not have enough opportunities to benefit from working regularly with experienced history teachers.
- Leaders and managers have recognised the need to strengthen the Key Stage 3 curriculum and plans are in place to ensure that all students will receive enough time to study a sufficient range of topics through a combination of depth, overview and thematic studies.
- Opportunities to establish partnerships with other schools to build expertise within this small department are beginning to develop in history but are currently at an early stage of development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the quality of teaching and learning by providing more opportunities for Teach First participants to work with experienced history teachers
- strengthening the curriculum at Key Stage 3 by:
 - fully implementing strategies to ensure that all groups of students receive enough curriculum time to study a sufficient range of topics through a combination of depth, overview and thematic studies

- ensuring that it fully meets the needs, interests and aspirations of all groups of students by exploiting opportunities for them to learn about the history of their local community and the history of the wide range of community groups that live within it
- strengthening expertise within the department by fully exploiting opportunities to develop partnerships with other schools in regard to provision for history.

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