

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



17 November 2011

Mr P Johnstone
Headteacher
Belvidere School
Crowmere Road
Shrewsbury
SY2 5LA

Dear Mr Johnstone

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 9 and 10 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Attainment is high and the proportion of students who attain the highest grades of A* and A is well above average for history nationally. All students make outstanding progress through the school and they invariably achieve, and often exceed, their very challenging predicted grades.
- Students say their lessons are exciting and 'hands on'. They spoke confidently about what they were learning in their history lessons and about the nature of the subject. For instance, they thought 'we might learn from past mistakes', but were conscious that there are long-standing issues that seem to change little over time. They used excellent examples from their work, especially about the concept of power and how power can sometimes be used poorly if not checked.

- Historical skills are being developed extremely well, although in Key Stage 3, boys' analytical writing skills do not develop as effectively as they do for girls. Other historical skills are developed extremely well. Students have excellent opportunities to work independently on research and well-planned homework topics.
- Students' personal development in history is outstanding. They are highly motivated and fully engaged in their learning. Students have confidence to ask questions when they require further clarification and they collaborate well in pairs and small group discussions. They behave extremely well.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- All teachers are well-qualified history graduates and they use their subject knowledge extremely well to engage students actively in lessons.
- Lessons are very well planned, have clear learning objectives and are suitably varied and challenging for students. There is a high level of consistency in the quality of lesson planning for all teachers.
- Work is marked accurately and students are kept regularly informed about how well they are doing. The department uses its excellent internally constructed support materials extremely well to ensure that all groups of students enjoy history.
- The main assessments are planned very carefully and students said they felt suitably challenged and stimulated to achieve their best. Regular checks are made in lessons to enable teachers to gauge how well students understand the tasks and topics being studied. Teachers use assessment information very well to provide the most appropriate tasks for students of different abilities.
- Excellent use is made of the teaching support assistant who is permanently assigned to the department. She is involved in planning and attends important meetings and is thus able to ensure that the students she supports make outstanding progress.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been well thought out and all aspects have been introduced, including a new one on the union of Britain to encourage reflection on how Scotland, Ireland and Wales contribute to British history. However, the department recognises it needs to increase further its focus on the changing beliefs, ideas and attitudes of people in Britain.
- Planning for progression in skills, themes and historical concepts is very clear. Growing links with other subjects are having a positive impact on attainment and progress, such as the joint project on Shrewsbury with the geography department.

- Curriculum plans also indicate clearly and well how topics are to be assessed and students' progress in developing historical skills is monitored.
- At Key Stage 4 the specifications have had a positive impact on students' attainment and interest in the subject. Students spoke knowledgeably about their studies.
- The department has ensured that students have a good knowledge of the locality and there have been trips to various sites in Shrewsbury. A good range of enrichment activities supplements the timetabled curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- The head of department has developed an excellent team of enthusiastic and committed history teachers. The department has focused extremely well on securing high attainment. The excellent work undertaken on assessment procedures and approaches in lessons means that all groups of students achieve extremely well.
- All teachers have a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the subject. The department's self-evaluation is accurate and succinct.
- Rigorous and highly effective procedures ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is first rate.
- The subject is organised extremely well and all resources are used very effectively.
- The subject is well regarded within the school and its popularity with students is evident in the large, and growing, number of students opting for history at GCSE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that boys' analytical writing skills are developed more systematically during Key Stage 3.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector