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Mr G Crowther  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Crowther

### **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 16 and 17 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 satisfactory.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Achievement is satisfactory across all key stages and results in national tests are generally in line with that found nationally. Although GCSE results dipped in 2011, an analysis of current performance demonstrates that concerns are being successfully addressed.
- Success rates in the sixth form are satisfactory. Rates of progress are improving quickly and securely, and attainment by the end of Year 13 is now broadly average and rising.
- In the large majority of lessons observed, students made good gains in developing their knowledge and understanding. A good start has been made in improving the quality of students' analytical and discursive writing, particularly in the upper school. However, too few opportunities

exist at Key Stage 3 to engage students in refining and developing their writing skills so that they are consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest levels.

- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. It is very popular and much enjoyed by students. Older students in particular are able to articulate confidently how their studies help to build their understanding of contemporary society. Students behave well in history and, when teaching is strongest, their behaviour is outstanding.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teaching has been strengthened and more of it is good and outstanding as a result of improvements in curriculum provision, underpinned by a greater collaborative approach to planning. In the past, teaching has not been sufficiently consistent to secure good progress for all groups of students across the key stages.
- Lessons benefit from teachers' good organisation and the time they invest in producing high-quality resources which make effective use of new technologies. Teachers plan well to remove barriers in learning, particularly for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- When teaching is at its best, activities are skilfully presented as dynamic opportunities to be explored and investigated with students engaged as partners in the learning process. They are encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning by developing ideas of their own and extending their historical skills.
- While learning objectives and success criteria are routinely shared with students, they are not always sufficiently challenging. Opportunities are sometimes missed to structure learning around high-quality and evaluative questions which challenge all students to think hard about complex historical issues. Similarly, on occasions, teachers do not make clear how the lesson fits into the overarching enquiry and the development of students' historical understanding is slowed.
- The quality of marking and assessment has improved significantly in recent months and good examples were seen, particularly in the upper school. A new academy policy is helping to further develop and secure the emerging quality of the department's work in this area. However, variation still exists and 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.

- History is a popular subject at GCSE and A level and higher proportions of students opt to pursue the subject beyond Year 9 than seen in other schools nationally.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides good opportunities for students to study topics in depth and it has recently been revised so that it is complemented by thematic studies and a greater focus on the development of key historical concepts and processes. The school recognises that its work in developing fully students' historical skills is still in its infancy.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of visits including trips to Warwick Castle, The Black Country Museum and The Imperial War Museum. These visits are much valued by students because they help them to set national events within a local context which, in the words of one student, 'helps us to fit the pieces together'.
- At Key Stages 4 and 5, the curriculum is improving to reflect more closely the demands of the course as teachers grow increasingly familiar with revised specifications. Older students reported how much they have appreciated more curriculum time being devoted to examination technique to improve their understanding of how to secure their individual target grades. This was evident in the accelerated progress of Year 10 and Year 13 students that was seen during the inspection.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- In the past, leaders and managers have not been sufficiently effective in securing good teaching in history or in addressing variations in assessment. As a result, achievement has been satisfactory. However, a range of inspection evidence shows that the department's focus on improving curriculum provision and the quality of teaching is beginning to bear fruit.
- The director of learning for history has successfully drawn together the department and secured a strong ethos and culture of teamwork and collegiality. This is embodied by the good start that the team has made in implementing a more appropriate curriculum to ensure greater progression in historical concepts and processes for all students across all key stages.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and increasingly effective in driving improvement. For example, the director of learning's response to underperformance at Key Stage 4 in 2011 has been timely, comprehensive and well-targeted. Students' performance is monitored regularly and additional support is put in place which is helping to accelerate progress.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- securing good achievement for all groups of students in lessons and over time, by:
  - ensuring that all teaching is as good as the best
  - ensuring that teaching and the curriculum consistently provide high levels of challenge through increased opportunities for students to apply their developing historical knowledge to answering challenging historical questions

- providing regular opportunities for Key Stage 3 students to develop the quality of their analytical and discursive writing so that they are consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest levels
- 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**