

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr M Graham
Headteacher
Heysham High School Sports College
Limes Avenue
Morecambe
Lancashire
LA3 1HS

Dear Mr Graham

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 28 and 29 February 2012 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Although attainment is low, the department's extremely rigorous monitoring procedures and data show clearly that the gap between the school's results and the national average for history is being reduced rapidly. As a result, students in both Key Stage 3 and 4 make good progress and some make outstanding progress.
- Attainment by the end of the first year in the sixth form is below average, but this represents satisfactory progress for students, some of whom find the transition from GCSE to A-level courses difficult. This is a new sixth form course. As a result, no final results have yet been published.
- In lessons, students often make excellent gains in historical knowledge and understanding, though in Year 7 progress in developing skills and concepts is slow to begin with due to insufficient curriculum time. Students

receive good support in preparing for examinations and ensuring that they meet their targets.

- Students have developed good attitudes to learning and work well with each other as well as on their own. They say they enjoy the challenges that history provides and they can discuss the topics they are studying well. They know their individual targets in detail and most can explain what they need to do to achieve, or exceed, them. Students behave extremely well in lessons.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Each lesson begins with clear lesson objectives shared with students and most lesson activities encourage the development of reasoning and critical thinking skills in debates and group work. Students said they enjoy the many opportunities to discuss important issues, such as the rise of Hitler and the failure of appeasement. They also value the support they receive from teachers to help them make rapid progress.
- Teachers use their history knowledge extremely well to enable students to respond to questions with carefully-thought-through answers. Also, good opportunities are in place for students to develop their literacy and communication skills, both in history and other subjects where history is a context for work. Students' books and files indicate that they can write in a variety of ways, such as generating persuasive letters to key leaders about policies and their impact on a range of people. However, analytical and discursive writing is not so well developed during Key Stage 3.
- Students' progress is monitored through a very well-planned sequence of assessment tasks. However, the monitoring of students' progress during lessons is undeveloped. In Years 7 and 8, teachers do not yet track students' progress in key thinking and history skills as well as they do in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Marking in books is exemplary and all students know exactly what they need to do to meet their targets.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The school offers a wide range of courses to meet students' different needs. The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a good introduction to all the required history topics, but local history remains underdeveloped.
- The department has made a number of good links with other subjects, particularly with creative subjects and English.
- The schemes of work for all key stages, including the sixth form, are extremely clear and detailed and provide a good indication how knowledge and understanding are to be developed.

- Students benefit from highly effective support, including an excellent revision programme to prepare for GCSE.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The history department has been rejuvenated over the past two years. It is now well led and managed and some leadership aspects are outstanding. The history team is relatively new to the profession but this has helped to boost the popularity of the subject in the school. Teachers work very well together to plan active tasks which engage all groups of students. Their joint hard work has led to the introduction of history post-16. The team works well together and has established good relationships with students.
- The department has a good capacity to improve further. The self-evaluation process is based securely on rigorous analysis of results. Excellent performance information generated by senior leaders is being used well to identify areas of weakness and to plan improvements. As a consequence, some aspects of teaching have become outstanding.
- The department has found the history report very useful in helping to re-build the subject. It uses its continuing professional development time sensibly to review the latest Historical Association materials and reflect on how these might be used to improve the rate of students' progress further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students' analytic and discursive writing skills are developed more rapidly during Key Stage 3
- better monitoring of students' learning during lessons
- more rigorous tracking of the progress students make in developing key history skills and conceptual understanding
- fuller provision for local history in 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