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Mr R Sawyer
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sawyer

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 June 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, two of which were joint observations with senior leaders.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Achievement is satisfactory because the quality of learning and progress has been satisfactory over time. However, differences exist between the key stages.
- At Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress. Some make good progress. When given the opportunity, they explain their ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions. However, opportunities are missed for all students to develop and refine their analytical and discursive writing skills. As a result, they are not consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest levels.
- For the last three years the proportion of students gaining the higher grades at GCSE has been above average. This represents good

achievement. Although results in 2011 were disappointing, the department has put in place a series of focused interventions to raise attainment for all groups of students.

- The number of students opting to take history at GCSE has fluctuated in recent years. It is now rising, due in part to the school's decision that all students will opt for either history or geography at Key Stage 4.
- In the sixth form, achievement is satisfactory. After two years of disappointing results, current estimates suggest that more students are on track to gain higher grades this year. Students enjoy the course and particularly appreciate the opportunity to study topics they haven't studied before. Some students make good progress.
- The development of students' thinking in history is underdeveloped at Key Stage 3. Younger students' understanding of reliability and how we might check accuracy of accounts and sources is not secure, nor is their understanding of the importance of analysing different interpretations and why interpretations must be handled with care. Older students, however, have a much clearer understanding of these historical skills.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. On the whole, students like history and enjoy their lessons. Relationships are good. Students have positive attitudes to learning, behave well in lessons and work well together and on their own.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are satisfactory. Some good teaching was observed. However, it has not been sufficiently consistent over time to secure good progress for all students at all key stages.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and committed and have good subject knowledge. However, opportunities for students to discuss and debate issues and to reflect on what they are learning are not always provided. This slows learning and restricts progress.
- Teachers' use of questions to probe students' thinking is variable. At times, good questioning prompts students' thinking effectively. However, students are not always required to turn brief oral answers into full responses which would assist them when they come to write their ideas. As a result, opportunities for students to develop formal rather than informal explanations are not always taken.
- Lessons are well planned and teachers use a variety of exercises and tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. However, the use of technology by students in their learning in history is underdeveloped.
- Although effective support is sometimes provided for students who require it, overall the level of expectation and challenge is not always sufficient to meet the needs of all students. Too often students are expected to

undertake the same work irrespective of their ability. This is because teachers' use of data in their planning is underdeveloped.

- Written feedback for students is variable. Where it is most helpful it provides students with effective guidance. In the sixth form, students are given detailed advice but, at Key Stage 3, too many comments on students' work lack subject-specific advice.
- Some teachers use on-going assessment in lessons adeptly to ensure that students make at least satisfactory progress. However, such effective practice is not yet a consistent feature of teaching in history.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers a range of appropriate topics. However, it lacks coherence and does not provide appropriate progression in the development of students' thinking in history.
- Although some enquires are introduced at the end of Year 8, the curriculum overall does not give sufficient attention to answering key historical questions through enquiries which combine depth, overview and thematic studies and which develop the full range of historical concepts and processes.
- Younger students benefit from re-enactment activities and older students from visits to the battlefields of the First World War. However, overall enrichment activities are limited, and the school does not exploit effectively Sheffield's rich historical heritage.
- The curriculum in the sixth form promotes students' personal development well. Students benefit from having the option of studying topics from either the Early Modern period or from more recent times.
- The range of pathways available at Key Stage 4, which include Entry Level, short course and full course GCSE, means that students are entered for their examinations in history when they are ready. The school is taking action to ensure that students who take GCSE at the end of Year 10 and want to study history beyond the age of 16 are not disadvantaged.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- Self-evaluation is satisfactory and the department has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for improvement. Appropriate priorities are identified in the development plan.
- Monitoring and evaluation are undertaken by the strategic subject leader and the lead learner for history. However, subsequent actions have not led in recent years to sustained improvements in outcomes for all students at all key stages.
- Schemes of work at Key Stage 3 provide a satisfactory framework for teachers. However, they do not include sufficient detail on how the various

units link together and how the full range of subject-specific concepts will be covered.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and reflective; they cooperate well and share ideas and resources.
- Curriculum and assessment links with neighbouring primary schools, to ensure that from the start of Year 7 students can make swift progress in their history lessons, are underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- securing good and outstanding achievement for all groups of students, by:
 - embedding opportunities for students to strengthen their analytical and discursive writing skills
 - providing students with regular opportunities to reflect upon and debate what they are learning and to explain their ideas formally when responding in discussions
 - developing teaching strategies to ensure that in lessons expectation and challenge are more closely aligned to students' needs
 - developing assessment practice and feedback to ensure that students are provided in a regular and consistent way with precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
 - ensuring that the curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers an appropriate range of topics, through a combination of depth, overview and thematic studies which focus on key enquiry questions, and that there is an explicit and well-defined approach to planning for progression in subject-specific skills
 - developing additional enrichment activities which make full use of Sheffield's rich historical heritage
 - establishing closer curriculum and assessment links with neighbouring primary schools to ensure that from the start of Year 7 students can make swift progress in developing their historical knowledge, thinking and understanding.

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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector