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Mrs L Lawson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lawson

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 between 11 and 13 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- After a dip in attainment in 2010, a significant improvement was shown in GCSE results in the following year. The department's data and inspection evidence indicate that the improvement is set to continue and the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades is likely to be close to the national average in 2012. All groups of students are now making good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Students have a good understanding of the importance of evaluating historical sources carefully and considering their provenance. They grasp the complexity of producing accounts of developments in the past. Although some struggle to deploy their knowledge to best effect to support an argument, others structure their work successfully, supporting their ideas well with references to appropriate sources. Most show a

developing understanding of historical interpretations and how these can differ, for example over the policy of appeasement in the 1930s.

- Students demonstrate a firm grasp of the importance of the study of history. One Year 11 student asserted the value of studying the subject in promoting 'a better understanding of politics' in the contemporary world, while another reported that history 'prepares you more for the future', citing the relevance of studying the 1930s depression to current world difficulties.
- The subject makes a very strong contribution to students' personal development. They value history and Year 11 students were particularly appreciative of the extra support provided for revision and the accessibility of the teachers who 'are there to listen and help you as much as they can'. A Year 9 student reported that 'lessons are really fun; they just get everyone involved and make it easy to learn what you need to learn'. This view was echoed frequently by others.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are planned very well to engage students' interest and involve them in the process of explaining events and developments in the past, using a wide range of historical sources. Students are pressed to think carefully, developing their ideas, and this is supported well by the structure of the lessons.
- In lessons observed, teaching was good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers' good subject knowledge was used well to identify arresting sources to catch students' attention. Students responded well to the effective use of resources to build their knowledge and understanding systematically. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on the First World War, students were keen to explore artefacts relating to a particular serviceman prior to asking questions of their teacher in role. Students' behaviour in lessons observed was always good and often outstanding.
- Teachers' marking is detailed and provides a clear indication of what students have done well and what they need to do to improve. Students particularly appreciate the recently-introduced opportunities to respond to marking and improve an aspect of their work.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- Schemes of work are detailed and innovative. In Key Stage 3, a thematic approach has been adopted where significant historical questions and issues are explored using varied approaches and historical sources. Students investigate ideas and concepts at different points in time. For example, 'empire' is explored through the Romans, the British Empire, slavery and the slave trade as well as the Irish diaspora.

- Schemes of work in Key Stage 4 are similarly detailed and address the requirements of the GCSE course very well. Significant historical questions, a wide range of sources and engaging approaches also feature prominently.
- A clear map of opportunities for assessment in Key Stage 3 is in place and portfolios of moderated work have been developed to support teachers in making assessments. It is a mark of the quality of the curriculum that there have been significant contributions to a bank of 'deluxe lessons' available to schools through the local authority as well as to local and national courses and conferences.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The head of department's passion for the subject is clear and shared by the staff. She has been in post for just over a year and is strongly committed to improving students' achievement. Insufficient time has passed for actions taken to have had their full impact on results.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and results from rigorous departmental and whole-school approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Clear and appropriate priorities for improvement have been identified.
- Data are collected frequently to track the progress of GCSE students, identifying any who might be at risk of underachieving and providing additional support through revision activities in Year 11. It has been recognised rightly that earlier intervention should reduce the need for help in the closing stages of the course. Action has begun to provide more opportunities for Key Stage 3 students to engage in activities designed to assess and develop their capacity to write more developed explanations of events and developments in the past.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to track students' progress rigorously in order to intervene earlier where needed and provide additional support or challenge
- pressing ahead with developments to support students in developing their skills in writing developed explanations in both Key Stages 3 and 4.

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

Grahame Sherfield
Her Majesty's Inspector