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Mr A Williamson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Williamson

### **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 26 and 27 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

#### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- All groups of GCSE students achieve well. Although results dipped in 2011, the school's data and inspection evidence indicate that students are set to reach standards that are well above average in this summer's examinations, a position similar to that achieved in 2010. Progress in the sixth form has improved and is now good as a result of careful monitoring of students' progress and focused teaching.
- Students have a strong grasp of the importance of studying history. A student in Year 13 emphasised how the subject helps us 'to understand our mistakes' while another in Year 11 indicated that studying important events in the past should enable us 'to live better in the future'. A Year 10 student added that history provides an understanding of 'why everything in society is the way it is'.

- Students show a very good understanding of the importance of evaluating historical sources carefully and know that sometimes this may well involve interpreting their hidden meaning. They grasp the importance of exploring possible patterns in the past and the inter-relationship between different events.
- Year 11 students demonstrated an impressive understanding of the nature of medical training in the medieval period while Year 10 work showed a firm grasp of the events of the Johnson County War and of the reasons for the outcome of the Battle of Little Bighorn. Year 13 showed a good understanding of the complexities of Weimar Germany and its vulnerability to the impact of the depression in the 1930s.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy the subject, particularly when more interactive approaches are adopted, and value the variety of activities they undertake in their history lessons.

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

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are planned carefully and often involve active approaches to developing students' knowledge, skills and understanding. Interactive whiteboards are effectively and widely used to present a range of interesting materials effectively.
- In lessons observed, teaching was often good and students benefited from activities that were structured well to promote discussion and develop understanding. For example, Year 12 students used a 'diamond nine' activity to explore reasons for tension between the Allies towards the end of the Second World War. Year 8 enjoyed a simple but effective simulation that established key features of the 'triangle trade' in the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. Students responded well to the challenge of working collaboratively, for example in a Year 7 class when they explored the significance of different Tudor monarchs.
- Students appreciate teachers' marking and the guidance provided on how to improve. A new, whole-school approach has been recently introduced to ensure consistency in identifying strengths and areas for development. On occasion, 'even better if' comments in history are too general and students report finding these less helpful. Involving students in identifying their response to teachers' marking and in charting their way forward is at an early stage of development.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is well organised into a series of studies that explore important historical questions in some detail, with particular strengths in investigating power, religion, empire and conflict. The department has correctly identified that the place of the history of the

British Isles and of the local area is under developed, as are themes and links that help students to connect their learning with previous or subsequent work.

- The curricula for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are set out in similar detail in order to share classroom approaches and to support the development of students' understanding.
- Teachers' assessment in Key Stage 3 is well organised and assists in the tracking of students' progress. Although teachers share examples of assessed work, currently no collection of moderated samples exists to support consistency in judgements.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The head of department is strongly committed to the subject and to raising its profile in the school to secure higher numbers choosing history as one of their examination courses. Since joining the school in September 2010, he has devoted much energy to revising and improving schemes of work, particularly to extend the most able, and to making changes in the examination courses.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and results from rigorous departmental, faculty and whole-school approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Clear and appropriate priorities for further improvement have been identified, for example enhancing enrichment of the curriculum and securing more curricular links with other subjects.
- Information on students' progress is collected frequently in order to identify those at risk of underachievement so that additional support or challenge can be provided.

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

- setting out themes and links in the Key Stage 3 curriculum to improve its coherence for students
- improving practice in
  - assuring the consistency of teachers' assessments in Key Stage 3
  - involving students in a dialogue over their progress and in identifying priorities for improvement for themselves.

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

**Grahame Sherfield**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**