

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6644  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr Bayston  
Headteacher  
St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School  
King Oswy Drive  
West View  
Hartlepool  
TS24 9PB

Dear Mr Bayston

Ofsted survey inspection programme - History and Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit I made with Mike Maddison HMI on 06 - 07 February 2007 to look at work in history and science.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

History

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in history are good.

- In 2006 70% of students achieved grades A\*-C in history. This was above the national average and represented a considerable increase on the results of the previous two years. In teacher assessments in 2006 71% of students achieved Level 5 or above in history. This is slightly above national expectations. It was also higher than the percentage of students who achieved Level 5 or above in the Key Stage 3 tests in English.

- Attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is broadly average but attainment at the end of both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is above average. This represents good progress.
- Lesson observations, discussions with students and scrutiny of work showed that achievement is generally good. Students can demonstrate a considerable knowledge of the topics they have covered in class and they are becoming increasingly skilful at evaluating sources.
- The personal development of students in history is good. They are enthusiastic about the subject and are keen to learn. Behaviour is good and there are positive relationships between students. Staff and students interact well. Attitudes to learning are good and students take a pride in their work. All these factors combine to create a very favourable climate for learning.

### Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning in history is good.

- Teaching is lively and engages the students well. A range of teaching strategies is employed that helps the students to be focussed and to make good progress. Paired and group work is used effectively. Lessons are well organised, involve challenging and varied activities, including the use of ICT, and proceed at a good pace. Stimulating displays in teaching rooms and on the corridors support the learning well. They provide, for example, clear guidance on how to improve both at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE.
- Good planning means that students' literacy skills are carefully developed alongside their historical knowledge, skills and understanding. Learning outcomes are made explicit and students are regularly reminded of the focus as lessons progress. This supports their learning well. The opportunity is taken in most lessons for students to develop their speaking and listening skills. However, insufficient time is allocated for discussions and for students to reflect upon what they are learning. As a result their understanding is not as well developed as their knowledge and their skills.
- Marking is regular and thorough and comments are constructive, give praise and identify how work can be improved. Assessment is accurate and students understand the effective systems that are used. They know their levels and targets and can explain what they need to do to improve. This contributes to students being enthusiastic learners who make good progress.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the demands of the examination specifications. It is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 and has some good links to other areas of the curriculum, notably to citizenship through the study of Islamic Civilisations. At Key Stage 4 the

change from studying social and economic history to modern world history has been a successful move and has led to a considerable improvement in results in the last two years.

- The scheme of work is very thorough and provides an effective basis for teachers to prepare their lessons. However, there is insufficient planning at present to identify precise opportunities for using ICT in lessons and specific tasks to meet the needs of higher attaining students.
- Students value the range of visits provided and the richness of the curriculum both inside and outside the classroom contributes to the students' enjoyment of this subject.

### Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The head of department has created an environment which is highly conducive to learning. There is a clear commitment to improvement and to raising standards throughout the department and this is accompanied by enthusiasm for the subject, good subject knowledge, hard work and effective teamwork.
- The department is well organised and has high expectations. Documentation is clear and well presented. Departmental self evaluation is accurate and the department has a good understanding of its many strengths and small number of areas for improvement. The work of the department is well monitored. Systems are in place to ensure both consistency and accuracy in marking and assessment and to facilitate the sharing of good practice.
- The department has made good progress since the last subject inspection and remedied the issues raised at that time, notably in relation to the integration of assessment.

### Subject issues

- In line with whole-school policy the history department identifies higher attaining students in each class. These students are encouraged to develop their ideas in group work and in written exercises but their needs are not being fully met because appropriate activities are not always specifically planned.
- All classrooms have interactive whiteboards and learning is supported by the use of ICT by both students and teachers. Students enjoy the variety of teaching methods employed through the use of the technology and interactive quizzes are particularly effective in reinforcing learning. However, the opportunities for using ICT have not yet been formally recognised and identified in departmental planning.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well catered for and make good progress. Higher attaining students also make good progress but formal planning to meet their needs is not yet fully embedded.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing departmental schemes of work which formally identify
  - precise opportunities for the use of ICT and
  - specific tasks to meet the needs of higher attaining students
- developing teaching and learning strategies to include more opportunities for students to discuss and to reflect upon what they are learning.

## Science

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards have improved in science at Key Stage 3. Achievement to age 14 is now good.
- In 2006, GCSE results were weak, though somewhat better than in 2005. Most students did less well than might have been expected from their starting points when they entered the school. Only two students had A or A\* grades in any science examination and only about a dozen achieved grade B. The recent mock GCSE examinations in Year 11 do not give confidence that the problem of under achievement has been addressed effectively. Students in the top set follow courses in the three separate sciences; they do not do well.
- Lesson by lesson, progress is generally satisfactory; this is also evident in students' books. The problem lies with consolidating this progress as achievement at GCSE.
- Students are cooperative, attentive, and take both a pride and an interest in their work in science. They are eager to learn. Students' personal development is very good. They are easy to teach.

### Teaching and learning

The impact of teaching on learning is satisfactory.

- Most of the eight lessons seen were good; none was inadequate. There were many instances of teachers' good subject knowledge and effective classroom methods.
- Weaknesses included: experiments that were not well organised, with unclear explanations, unclear presentation, and work that was time consuming but marginal to the syllabus.
- In the main, the way students are grouped by ability in sets is effective, and work is generally pitched at an appropriate level. However, there were instances of low expectations – such as Year 10 students who had average standards in national tests at age 14 doing work more typical of that for students aged 11 or 12.
- Schemes of work are satisfactory. They match topics to the number of lessons available, and give a helpful outline of what each lesson might comprise. With occasional exceptions, they are not specifically adapted for teaching sets of differing ability.
- Preparation of students for assessment of investigational skills is generally sound, though some Year 11 students are not adequately prepared for the evaluation of experiments.
- Marking is mostly satisfactory. Many books have some helpful comments written by teachers, but there is not always clear guidance on what exactly would have made a piece of work better. Work is often endorsed with a stamp such as: "Evidence of Level 5" – but this does not by itself tell the student whether it was as good as it might have been or what might be wrong with it.
- The system for regular assessment of students' attainment, for keeping track of their progress and for intervention to correct underachievement is not fit for purpose in Key Stage 4. Assessment is sometimes unreliable – for example, with teachers' estimated grades for students on separate science courses in Year 11. Intervention is insubstantial and haphazard.

## Curriculum

Curricular arrangements for science are satisfactory.

- Arrangements in Key Stage 3 are effective.
- The provision of three separate science GCSE courses for the top set in Key Stage 4 is unsuccessful and unnecessary.
- Only students in the top set (separate sciences) in Key Stage 4 are prepared for the higher tier of GCSE. In consequence, no students in set 2 achieved above grade C at GCSE in 2006. This is unacceptable.
- The system whereby each GCSE module is supposedly taught by a specialist in biology, chemistry or physics, with rotation of teachers through the year, is unsustainable, disruptive and undermines accountability. Half the physics modules are in fact being taught by a biologist because the number of teachers in each discipline is unbalanced. Teachers say that the changes are unsettling for the students. Moreover, the system results in no one teacher being accountable for the

achievement of students in any one teaching group. The school recognises that this system should change, but appreciates that there are professional development implications for some staff.

- There is some effective use of ICT in lessons. A particularly good example was the use of animated software to develop understanding of the Haber process for making ammonia.
- Some innovations encouraged by the National Secondary Strategy are practiced by teachers to good effect. This is particularly the case with 'starters': short, crisp pieces of work at the start of a lesson to refresh previous topics and get lessons off to a brisk beginning. These are sometimes noted in schemes of work.
- With some sets in Year 11, new work is being taught so far into the year that there is not as much time as there should be for systematic revision for GCSE.
- The diet provided for students involves too many worksheets with trivial tasks.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management relating to science at senior and middle management levels are inadequate.

- There has been good leadership and management, at all levels, leading to improvement in Key Stage 3 science.
- Schemes of work give a satisfactory indication, in broad terms, of what is to be taught lesson by lesson. New schemes have been developed for the new GCSE syllabus. They do not yet have amplification for lessons with more able or less able students. They lack the detail that will be necessary for teaching of topics by non-specialist science teachers.
- Some lessons seen had generic weaknesses that have gone uncorrected. Records of lesson observations have insufficient rigour and candour to improve practice. Senior leaders have not instituted an effective system for monitoring and improving teaching across the school.
- Control of students' progress in Key Stage 4 is inadequate within the department and at senior leadership level. The department's assessment systems in Key Stage 4 are not as reliable as they should be. Departmental and senior leaders have not established an adequate system for tracking the progress of students in Key Stage 4 and timely intervention to ensure improvement for underachievers.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- The provision for the least able students in Key Stage 4 is appropriate.
- Achievement is much the same for boys and girls and for students of different abilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the 'teacher rotation' system which disrupts learning and dilutes responsibility for achievement
- preparing more students for the higher tier of GCSE
- improving schemes of work further
- improving quality control of teaching
- establishing an effective system for monitoring progress and attending to underachievement in Key Stage 4.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history and science in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jim Bennetts  
Her Majesty's Inspector