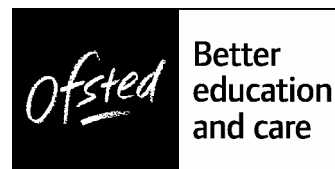


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



19 March 2007

Mr I Fraser
Headteacher
Ashfield Comprehensive School
Sutton Road
Kirkby-in-Ashfield
Nottinghamshire
NG17 8HP

Dear Mr Fraser

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History and the GCSE pilot

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 January visit to look at work in history.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of history, the visit had a particular focus on the GCSE pilot, information and communication technology (ICT) and the gifted and talented.

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 the head of faculty, discussions with pupils and staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and the observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Pupils of all ages achieve well but their standards are below average.

- Pupils of all ages make good progress because of the mostly good teaching and learning they experience. Younger pupils, for instance, are developing well their knowledge and understanding of the medieval period. They know more about the social and economic structure of the feudal system and can identify roles and responsibilities for different classes of people. Pupils in Year 11 are consolidating well

their knowledge and understanding of key individuals and developments in the fight against diseases.

- Recent results in the GCSE examinations have fluctuated. The proportion gaining grades A*-C fell from around 56% in 2004 to 43% in 2005. The faculty targeted various areas of underperformance in the examination and the results for 2006 improved although they remain below average. Results at A-level have improved over the last two years. 97% of students secured a pass grade in 2006 compared to nearly 85% in 2005. At AS-level, however, results have fallen.
- In the GCSE pilot, pupils' progress is good. Their knowledge and understanding are developing well. Pupils can evaluate and interpret different sources of evidence effectively, for example about whether King Arthur existed or not. They are extending their understanding of different kinds of evidence and its interpretation. Many are particularly interested in the study of the local mining industry because they feel it has more relevance to them.
- Across all ages, pupils' skills in literacy are underdeveloped. Many do not write at length and often make simple mistakes in their use of correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good and, occasionally, outstanding. They have very good relationships with each other and with adults. They settle down to work quickly and many are interested in the subject, even the lower attainers.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are mostly good. They have the following characteristics:

- Teachers have good relationships with the pupils and manage them in a friendly but firm manner.
- Good use is made of PowerPoint presentations, particularly in the introduction to the lesson.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the subject, recap previous work well and use incisive questioning to extend and consolidate the pupils' learning. The pupils, in turn, respond well to this.
- The planning of lessons generally takes into account the needs of the various abilities although this could be improved. Independent learning is encouraged through the use of work in small groups and in pairs.
- Marking and assessment procedures are generally good. Pupils' work is regularly marked and they are normally given an indication of how to improve their work. They usually know which level they are working at and what their target grade is.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is supported by detailed and appropriate schemes of work.

- In the GCSE pilot, initial planning has been undertaken for the two Year 10 mixed-ability groups which study the subject. However, the staff correctly recognise that much more work needs to be done soon if overall course coherence is to be established. Equally, there is a need for more detailed work on the delivery of the four assessment objectives and their assessment. An adequate mark scheme for coursework on mining has been formulated and staff acknowledge that they now need to do the same for all units.
- Teachers are regularly reviewing the pilot course and would like to teach the units on heritage management and marketing, and on international terrorism. However, staff indicated, with some justification, that the availability of resources for these units is a potential problem.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The subject is led well by an able, enthusiastic and experienced head of faculty. He is supported well by other staff. The two staff who teach the GCSE pilot are appropriately qualified and experienced. Cluster meetings, particularly those run by the examinations board, have been useful for sharing experiences.
- There is a good team ethos within history despite the fact that there has been some staff turnover in the last two years.

Subject issue: ICT

Teachers use ICT regularly in their teaching and they use it primarily for Power Point presentations. Staff also have access to one interactive whiteboard. In the written work scrutinised, pupils are generally developing their word processing skills well. However, the use of other ICT skills needs to be further developed; for example, investigative work.

Inclusion

The needs of lower attaining pupils are generally well met through the school's setting arrangements. Lower attaining pupils are identified and most are taught as a class. Sometimes, pupils are supported by learning support assistants. However, teachers and learning support assistants are not regularly involved in joint planning and are not identifying the setting of appropriate targets for pupils. There were two instances when learning

support assistants appeared in the classroom to support individual pupils and the teacher had no prior knowledge about this.

The needs of gifted and talented pupils are met reasonably well through routine teaching methods, for example through the setting of more open-ended tasks. This area needs strengthening through the proper identification of gifted historians and the setting of challenging targets for them. These targets should be regularly reviewed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that pupils of all abilities are encouraged to write more extensively in history and that their literacy skills are more accurately developed
- ensure that the needs of the lower attaining pupils and those that are gifted and talented are better met
- ensure that pupils' skills in the use of ICT are more fully developed.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Champak Chauhan
Her Majesty's Inspector