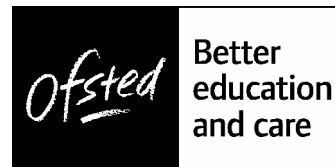


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04 December 2006

Mrs C McLintock
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McLintock

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on Wednesday 22 November 2006 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. 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in history overall are good.

- Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average, but after a slow start in history students make good progress through Key Stage 3 and results at GCSE are above average with 66% attaining 5 A*-C grades. Results in the sixth form are below average but inspection evidence indicates that progress is satisfactory. Girls continue to outperform boys at Key Stage 3 but in 2006 boys did better than girls for the first time in many years. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

- Students' personal development is good in history. Students value their history lessons highly. They are keen and enthusiastic to learn and behaviour in lessons is excellent.
- Not surprisingly, history is a very popular option at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning in history is good.

- All teachers form excellent relationships with students and adopt a wide range of active strategies to engage and motivate students to achieve well. Students are encouraged to work productively and as a consequence the quality of class discussions and the interactions between teachers and students is consistently good. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to stretch the more able students appropriately and to develop students' independent learning skills.
- Assessment procedures are satisfactory. Assessment for learning strategies are not yet embedded fully and as a result the monitoring and tracking of individual students is undeveloped. The department is planning more robust procedures for addressing this, including more student self-evaluation.
- Support and guidance in history is good. Students felt that their work was marked regularly and that comments were helpful in helping them to improve. However, marking practices are not consistently applied across the department. Teaching Assistants are used effectively to manage learning for identified groups of students.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The department has worked hard to provide a history curriculum which meets the needs of all students. There are adequate opportunities to develop extended writing skills. Students made a particular point of emphasising how much they enjoyed their history lessons and the range of topics they studied. They felt they were being very well prepared for further study of history and the world of work.
- The department correctly identifies that students in Year 12 develop their arguing and communication skills too slowly.
- The department also is aware that curriculum provision would be improved still further by developing the embryonic history web site which would widen the opportunities for individual students to explore their history interests further.

Leadership and management of history

Leadership and management in history are good.

- History became a separate subject in September 2006 having previously been part of a humanities programme. The new head of department, in this short time, has created a good environment for learning in history. She has worked extremely hard, with her highly motivated and skilled colleagues, to address issues of relating to achievement and standards in history.
- Departmental self-evaluation is good. The department accurately identifies and exemplifies its strengths and areas for development clearly and accurately. It has made good progress since the school's last inspection and knows that it has to consolidate as well as build on its current successes.

Subject issue

The history department has placed great emphasis on developing all aspects of literacy, not just writing. This focus is contributing well to raising standards in history and to better achievement for boys. These developments have been encouraged and supported by the school in general.

Inclusion

All groups of students make progress in history but the more able students are not stretched fully.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to embed assessment for learning strategies in order to consolidate as well as improve standards of attainment
- to explore ways of providing even more stretch and challenge for able students, especially at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form
- to enable students to develop better their independent learning skills
- to develop the history web site so that all students can have increased opportunities to follow their history interests further.

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 Local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector