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Mr J Hallworth
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Dear Mr Hallworth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during the visit I made on 11-12 February to look at work in history, including the pilot GCSE course in Year 10.

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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory. There are significant strengths and the department is demonstrating a clear capacity to improve. However, there is too much inconsistency in provision and, as the school acknowledges, standards are not currently high enough.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly in line with national averages, although GCSE results in 2006 fell markedly.

- Teacher assessment at Key Stage 3 shows that similar proportions of pupils achieve the expected Level 5 and the higher levels as pupils gain nationally. This correlates with the standards seen in extended pieces of work during the inspection and represents satisfactory achievement.
- Standards at GCSE have been broadly in line with national averages and in 2005 pupils' average achievement in history was above that in

the other subjects they studied. Standards fell in 2006, with 44% achieving grades A*-C, in comparison with 65% nationally.

- There has been no formal assessment of pupils' work in the pilot GCSE as pupils are currently completing their first coursework assignment. The standard of pupils' classwork and homework is comparable to that of pupils pursuing the traditional GCSE course.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and they collaborate well in paired and group work. They take care with the presentation of their work. Some pupils, up to a third in some classes, are passive rather than enthusiastic learners, whereas others are very keen. There is some inappropriate behaviour on occasions.
- Pupils undertaking the pilot GCSE course are enjoying the course and gaining confidence as well as subject knowledge. They appreciate the clear guidance they receive about their work.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about history. Their enthusiasm, and the varied activities they provide, helps to engage pupils. Lessons are structured, in line with school policy. Purposeful and challenging tasks develop pupils' historical skills and conceptual understanding as well as their knowledge.
- Pupils' learning is increasingly well supported by the use of peer and self-assessment. In addition, teachers' detailed comments on their written work identify clear targets for improvement.
- The quality of teaching and learning varies and does not always reflect the good features outlined above. In particular, lesson aims sometimes describe what pupils will do, rather than what they are expected to learn. Tasks are not always sufficiently challenging and some pupils have too few opportunities to write independently and at length. The quality of teachers' comments also varies. There is too much use of dated and unattractive resource sheets.
- The department's current review of its Key Stage 3 assessment, and the introduction of integrated and substantial tasks, is appropriate. The tasks developed to date have the potential to produce more worthwhile and accurate assessment of pupils' achievements than the current fragmented system.
- Teaching and learning in the GCSE pilot are good. The work is well planned, appropriately challenging and pupils are responding well. The feedback pupils receive on their work is of high quality.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- There has been a clear attempt to make the Key Stage 3 curriculum more coherent by highlighting the need to establish links between the historical periods studied. The scheme of work also identifies clear links with literacy and ICT, as well as opportunities to relate pupils' studies to the school's business and enterprise specialism. As yet, there is no clear guidance on progression in historical skills or conceptual understanding.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum for those pupils following the Schools' History Project GCSE course is aligned with the specification requirements. Consideration is being given to changing one unit to reflect pupils' interests.
- In the pilot GCSE, the school is making a clear attempt to construct a coherent scheme of work while taking advantage of the breadth of choice available. Current plans include a vocational unit. The units covered to date are well planned and provide good opportunities for pupils to develop the knowledge and skills required for the assessment tasks. The department has recognised the need to review the teaching of historical interpretations at Key Stage 3 in the light of the pilot.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- The subject leader had identified the right priorities for improvement and, in the example of assessment at Key Stage 3, has made good progress with the support of the department. The priorities are outlined in the development plan, although success criteria in particular are not sufficiently precise.
- The school's monitoring procedures are used consistently by the department. They include robust analysis of GCSE results. Although the monitoring procedures are sound, the department currently has an over-generous assessment of its effectiveness, given pupil outcomes. However, there is clear commitment to improvement and proven capacity.
- The pilot GCSE course is being managed appropriately. The school is concerned about aspects of the support it has received from the Awarding Body.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Good care is taken to analyse the performance of different groups of pupils. Boys achieved marginally better than girls at GCSE in 2006,

reversing the pattern of the previous year. Pupils from minority ethnic heritage performed at least as well as their peers.

- The department has taken good steps to promote equality and pupils' awareness of other cultures, highlighting these aspects in its curriculum. All pupils whose Key Stage 4 'pathway' includes a history option have access to the pilot GCSE course.
- Although pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and the more able, are identified on teachers' lesson plans, too great an emphasis is placed on differentiation by outcome at times.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that there is more consistency in the quality of teaching and learning in history
- consolidating the revised assessment procedures for Key Stage 3, including procedures for moderation
- refining the development plan with more precise measures.

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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector