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Mrs C Stubbings
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Stubbings

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit I made on 23 May 2007 to look at work in history. I looked at all aspects of the history department's work including provision for gifted and talented history students.

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.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding throughout the school.

- The overall standard reached by students in history in Key Stage 3 is excellent given that attainment on entry is wider than for many other grammar schools. In Key Stage 4, standards are extremely high and compare very favourably with top performing selective schools in the local authority. This represents excellent progress. All groups of girls do very well in the subject during their time at the school.
- The overall standard in the sixth form is also well above average with students making excellent progress. Particularly noteworthy is the high

number of A and B grade passes at A-level in 2006. A high number of students go on to study history at university.

- Based on my review of students' work in class and in their folders, the overall standard for able girl historians is well above average though some opportunities are missed to enable these students to follow up their own history interests in class. These students have an excellent attitude to history and they respond well to the style of teaching which is encouraging them to be even more independent and thoughtful.
- Support for those girls who find history more challenging is excellent and guidance is targeted very well to ensure written tasks, in particular, are undertaken rigorously and productively.
- Work in history is encouraging students' personal development extremely well. Apart from useful knowledge, students are developing significant skills which will help them later in life. Generally girls are being encouraged to take more initiatives in their work which is helping them to become more confident as people. In history girls can apply their skills from other subjects (in particular ICT and literacy) extremely well. Girls' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development within history is also excellent.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in history is outstanding.

- The core history team is skilled and experienced and obviously enjoys teaching history. Other, less experienced teachers, are supported very well and perform impressively. Throughout the school lessons are very well planned and objectives are crystal clear and shared well with students. Teachers use the key elements of the National Strategies, such as Assessment for Learning, extremely well to make students take responsibility for their own learning.
- Assessments are used most effectively to set clear targets for students. Sometimes students are involved in assessing their own work but more opportunities need to be provided for self-review of this type.
- Books and folders show excellent progression in challenge, with ample volume of work. Marking is regular though some comments do not offer sufficient guidance on how students can improve.
- Teachers and students make good use of resources.
- When interviewed, students described teachers as passionate about history and passionate about sharing the subject with others. This comes across very strongly. Students also considered that the subject is very well taught.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The two-year Key Stage 3 course is innovative, exciting and much appreciated by students. It covers a wide range of topics and gains students' interest by packaging challenging social, political and economic history in instantly appealing topics.
- The sixth form curriculum is well established and, given the excellent results, is very well-matched to students' needs.
- There is a rich programme of extra-curricular activities to interest and engage all students. Gifted and talented students, for instance, have ample opportunities to extend their learning and listen to the many outside speakers who visit the school. In the sixth form able historians have excellent support, through extra lessons for the Advanced Extension Award and Oxford Aptitude Test for history.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are outstanding.

- History is led and managed extremely well. The subject is supported very well by the school's senior management. All teachers in the department share the same high aspirations which are being translated effectively into practice.
- Departmental self-evaluation is well established and is accurate. The department knows what it does well and where it can improve.
- There are tight and rigorous strategies in place for monitoring the subject area embracing lesson observations, work scrutinies, monitoring of lesson plans and pupils tracking.

Subject issue: provision for the gifted and talented

As indicated elsewhere in this letter, gifted and talented students are supported well although there is scope for further improvement.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is excellent. Teachers respond very well to the needs of different students including those who find history challenging.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed:

- ensure that marking comments offer more helpful advice on how students can improve
- ensure that student self-review is employed more consistently across the department

- provide more opportunities for gifted and talented historians to follow up, and use in class, the fruits of their personal history interests.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector