

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



15 May 2007

Mr T Lewis
Headteacher
Mildenhall College of Technology
Bury Road
Mildenhall
Suffolk
IP28 7HT

Dear Mr Lewis

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit I made on 08 and 09 May 2007 to look at work in history. I looked at all aspects of the history department's work including the new 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good with outstanding features in the sixth form.

- The overall standard reached by students in history in Key Stage 3 is average. However, in relation to their ability on entry, students make good progress through the key stage. In Key Stage 4, standards are just above average and again, students make good progress. GCSE results have varied year-on-year due to the department's laudable policy of allowing students of all abilities to opt for history but the overall trend in both Key Stages 3 and 4 since 2001 has been upwards.

In general, girls do better than boys, something which the department is addressing.

- The overall standard in the sixth form is also above average with students making good and sometimes outstanding progress. Particularly noteworthy is the high number of A- grade passes in the AS examination in 2006 which the department hopes will be translated into equally good A-level results this year.
- Based on my review of students' work in class and in their folders, the overall standard in the GCSE pilot is above average and students' are progressing well. This is because they have an excellent attitude to the course and because they are responding well to the style of teaching which is encouraging them to be independent and thoughtful.
- Work in history is encouraging students' personal development very well. Apart from useful knowledge, students are developing significant skills which will help them later in life. Generally, but particularly in the GCSE pilot, students are being encouraged to take more initiatives in their work which is helping them to become more confident as people. However, in all courses, opportunities are missed in to develop students' oral communication.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning in history is good with some outstanding features.

- Teachers are very skilled practitioners who obviously enjoy teaching their subject. Lessons are well planned and objectives are clear and shared well with students. Lessons are increasingly being structured to make students take responsibility for their own learning by asking questions, finding out answers and communicating them effectively. However, teachers acknowledge that this can still be developed further.
- Teachers and students make good use of resources including the particularly well-developed use of the internet and distance learning using television links with other schools.
- 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. They particularly like having to do more for themselves.
- Students' work is regularly assessed and teachers make helpful oral and written comments. Peer and self assessment are becoming increasingly effective in helping students learn. Students know how well they are doing and how to improve. Teachers use assessment data well to help with lesson and other planning so that they can meet students' needs.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The Year 9 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 such as 'Jack the Ripper'.
- There are three GCSE programmes, one of which is a short course. Another is the new GCSE pilot. All are successful. The department's approach to the pilot GCSE is particularly interesting, weaving in local history and exploiting modern media to allow different ways to present students' work on the topics selected. This successfully links the past to the present and helps students to understand the world in which they live.
- The sixth form curriculum is well established and, given the good results, is well-matched to students' needs.
- There is scope to increase curriculum flexibility even further so that provision more closely meets the needs and interests of all groups of students. The department is also very keen that there should be GCSE pilot follow-on provision in the sixth form.
- The links via the Comenius Project with schools in Germany and Poland and the department's significant programme of visits to historic sites are providing exciting, relevant opportunities for students and support learning well.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good with some outstanding features.

- History is led and managed extremely well at both departmental and faculty level and is well-supported 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.
- Changes to the curriculum and to teaching styles have been made in recent years which have led to the overall improvement in standards. Given these changes, it is very likely that standards will continue to rise. Broader social and cultural issues in the community affect the whole school and cannot be solved by history alone. However, they have affected the pace of improvement which may otherwise have been swifter.
- The department has taken appropriate steps to develop the pilot GCSE. Good use has been made of the support provided through the awarding body including the opportunities for discussion with other pilot schools and with the consortium leader.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good. Teachers respond well to the needs of different students including those with learning difficulties by providing different work and written and spoken encouragement during lessons. Setting arrangements in Year 9 also help. The needs of the gifted and talented are acknowledged by the provision of special activities; for example, through the Comenius Project already mentioned.

The department acknowledges that there is scope to make its curriculum more inclusive by providing opportunities to study topics such as the stories of the different peoples of the UK. Plans to look at this in the context of the new Key Stage 3 are sensible.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included further development of:

- students' ability to be independent learners
- students' oracy skills
- the curriculum to make it more inclusive and more relevant to students' understanding of the world in which they live.

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

Paul Armitage HMI
Ofsted Specialist Adviser for History